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AN ANNOUNCEMENT:

The September 1987 number of *The North American Review* will contain a special 48-page supplement,

The Woman Question

drawn from the pages of the NAR since the middle of the Nineteenth Century. The status of women in America, attitudes toward them, biases for and against them, assessments of their progress toward equality—these and other matters were treated by the country's most astute contemporary writers, both male and female. The Woman Question will draw them into a single sourcebook, concluding with a summary essay by the supplement's editor, Carolyn Hardesty.

ORDERING FOR CLASSROOM USE

Women's Studies directors and teachers of university or senior high school courses in which the status of women is the subject matter may order classroom copies of the September issue of the NAR in quantity at a discount of 20% off the regular $3.00 cover price (with an additional 2% discount for prepayment).

The editors urge that orders be placed in timely fashion; *orders received after August 1, 1987 will be honored only as availability of the issue permits.*
The September NAR will be shipped before October 1, 1987.

The North American Review

University of Northern Iowa Cedar Falls, IA 50614

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

■

We are, of course, never satisfied. No sooner is this 172nd Anniversary number of the NAR ready for the printer, than we are impatient for the years ahead of us and are laying plans for 1) a special Heritage issue for September that will do for "The Woman Question" what our Fall 1972 issue did for "The Indian Question"—that is, provide an overview of more than a hundred years of thought and discussion carried on within the pages of *The North American Review*—and 2) the inauguration of a series of articles dealing with "creativity"—defining it, exploring it, understanding it—the articles to be written by authors, artists, scientists, architects, educators, dancers—men and women of brilliance and eccentricity and exciting bias—and, finally, 3) a new round of concerned essays on the subject of the environment and what we are and are not doing to preserve its life-sustaining virtues. Watch, as they say, this space.

Not to mention that even as our first hardcover anthology of Four-Minute Fictions finds its way into bookstores (see back cover), the early stuff of volume two is already in place for your approval, starting on page 34.

We're pleased to welcome back to the NAR four writers whose work we first offered our readers in the distant past: Erin McGraw, Shelley Costa, Perry Glasser and Sarah Rossiter are friends of long standing—the latter two, coincidentally, the authors of new story collections to be published soon by the University of Illinois. And Nancy Roberts's "The Upstairs People" is from her new collection, *Women and Other Bodies of Water*, just published by Dragon Gate.

A Note to NAR Readers:

In mid-July, author Andre Dubus was seriously hurt when he was struck by a car after he stopped to assist another motorist on I-93 near Boston. The other motorist was killed outright; Andre sustained severe injuries, and doctors at Mass General were obliged several weeks later to amputate one of his legs. He will spend most of this year—his Guggenheim year—in a body cast.

Andre is one of this country's premier short story writers and has, over many years, been a good friend and valued contributor to the NAR. Many of his most brilliant stories—"Separate Flights," "Contrition," "If They Knew Yvonne," "The Pitcher," and others—have appeared here, and accident or no, it is a safe bet that Andre will go on writing and his fiction will continue to make us wiser.

Meanwhile, the matters of the factual world—most especially the enormous medical costs—must be dealt with. A series of five readings, called the Friends of Andre Dubus Literary Series, was organized, alas, too late to be noted in the NAR's December issue, and the readings themselves (by Richard Yates and Kurt Vonnegut, Gail Godwin and John Updike, Stephen King and John Irving, Tim O'Brien and Ann Beattie, Jayne Anne Phillips and E.L. Doctorow) have already taken place as this March issue leaves the press. Contributions from those who were unable to attend the readings may be sent to:

The Friends of Andre Dubus Literary Series
c/o ProMotion
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THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

FOUNDED IN 1815 VOLUME 272, NUMBER 1 MARCH 1987

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RATES:

$3.00 a copy; $11.00 a year in the U.S. and its possessions, $12.00 in Canada and Latin America; all others $14.00

CREDITS

Cover: *Gary Kelley*

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THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW [ISSN 0029-2397], March 1987, Vol. 272, No. 1. Published quarterly, in March, June, September, December by the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. Annual subscription rates: $11.00 in the United States and its possessions, $12.00 in Canada and Latin America, $14.00 in all other countries. Second class postage paid at Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. Copyright © 1987 by the University of Northern Iowa. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the permission of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of the University of Northern Iowa. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage affixed. Fiction manuscripts are read only between January 1 and March 30. Claims for subscriber copies not received must be made within six months of date of publication. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to *The North American Review*, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW is indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, the Humanities Index, Index to Little Magazines, Index of American Periodical Verse, the Book Review Index, and others. Member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM). Article reprints and back file volumes in microform are available from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 or 18 Bedford Row, London WCIR 4EJ. U.S. and Canadian newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870.

The Institute

ERIN McGRAW

For those without good reason to come, gaining even initial access to the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction calls for a fair degree of perseverance. Students must bring along written requests from their faculty sponsors, and all callers must be prepared to indicate precisely what it is they are seeking. It's easily forgotten on this pretty campus, known more these days for its basketball coach than for the frankness of its scientific research, that Indiana University in Bloomington still houses the agency sometimes credited for pushing the United States out of the plump, sexually complacent 1950s.

When the elevator doors opened on the third floor, the secretary glanced up at me sharply. I was staring in bewilderment at the hallway, as bright and full of purposeful-looking people as an insurance office. What had I expected? People in lab coats, maybe, and muffled, throaty cries from down the hall.

"Can I help you?" I gave the secretary my name, explaining that I was there for research and that there was a letter on file vouching for me.

"Just a minute," she said and picked up the telephone, jabbing at the numbers and keeping a careful eye on me. After telling someone that I had arrived claiming I had work to do, she reached for a file and found the letter. She filled out a card. She asked me to produce some identification. She made a photocopy of my driver's license and attached it to the card. She asked me to sign in. She made another phone call. She gave me an orange plastic badge with three numbers on it. A woman emerged from a doorway behind me and told me to follow her.

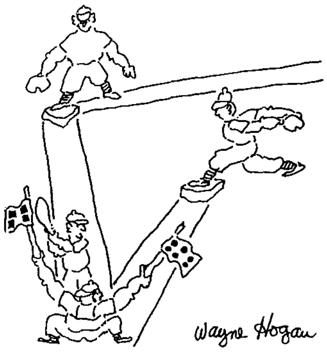
This was Gwen Pershing, the Institute librarian. She chatted as we walked up a flight of stairs and through a broad, empty office. Had I ever been to the Institute before? Was I planning on doing a lot of work here? We entered a hallway similar to the one on the floor below and she showed me where to hang my jacket. "Only pens and pencils are allowed in the library," she said, opening a locked closet for me to leave my purse.

The Institute library was only a few yards down the hallway, and I glanced surreptitiously at the Venuses and priapic figures on the walls. Having been cleared only to look at a single chapter of one book having to do with the legal ramifications of surrogate mothering, I didn't want to be caught out peeking at the artwork.

The library was small, and an unlikely January sun was pouring through windows that were barred with ropey ivy vines. Gwen gave my name to the other librarian, a young woman with thick dark hair, and said, "She's here to copy some information on surrogates."

"Oh yes. I got a phone call about this." She came back from the stacks perhaps fifteen seconds later with the book in hand. "Sign in, please," Gwen said before handing it to me. "Be sure to log in the time, too." It was 3:30.

The copier was located in front of the counter in the crowded room, and Gwen lounged on the far side of the counter, talking to the other librarian. Her elbow, resting behind her, was eighteen inches from my nose, and I photocopied with diligence. As soon as I handed back the book and paid for the copies, she came around the counter to lead me back downstairs. "Don't forget to log out," she reminded me, and I wrote down my name again. 3:35.



Gwen asked me about my research as we were going out, suggesting other possible sources—I might try looking under Artificial Insemination, she suggested, or Infertility. *Tricks of the trade*, I thought. She wished me luck, and I left my badge with the secretary before I took the elevator back to the ground floor.

It isn't necessary to have a tantalizing encounter with the Institute to be intrigued by it, intrigued by the whole notion of a group of people studying the taboo emotions and artifacts of our culture. Most of America became intrigued—and then obsessed—with the Kinsey Institute in 1948, when *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was published. Never mind that it was written for academics, filled with tables and citations—90% of American men masturbated! 30% had had homosexual experiences!—no prose was dry enough to keep it from being news, and the book, to the astonishment of its author, became a best seller.

Alfred Kinsey, jowled and heavy-eyed as a bloodhound, had scarcely had fame on his mind when he conducted the methodical research that led to the book. He was a scientist, a biologist whose passion in life was the collection and identification of gall wasps, as pure and ivory-tower an academic as one could hope to find. The research into sexuality had been a sideline, begun over the objections of some faculty members, after the Association of Women Students petitioned for a course that answered the needs, as they delicately put it, of students who were contemplating marriage.

But no one, not even a scholar, could go about publishing books on human sexuality in America in 1948 without people paying attention, and Kinsey was thrust, with his jowls and his bow tie, firmly into the national limelight. Again and again he explained that yes, he had conducted his research by means of interviews; yes, the interviews were entirely confidential and information was freely proffered; yes, a third of the men interviewed said they had had homosexual experiences. Those activities we think are "abnormal," he kept saying, may not be abnormal at all. No one could get over it. America was fascinated.

Then, in 1953, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was published. Surely this was the obvious next volume; the spirit of scientific inquiry that collected and labeled hundreds of thousands of gall wasps demanded it. How could we hope to understand human sexual behavior without a careful and comprehensive overview of female responses and attitudes? But this reasonable spirit of scientific inquiry overlooked the formidable wall that separated the sexes in 1950s America. The country was more than fascinated with the new volume—it was appalled. Bad enough to be told that men were onanistic, corrupt—bad enough, but forgivable. Boys would ever be boys. But to imagine that 50% of the women interviewed had not been virgins when they married, fully *25%* had had extramarital affairs—it was unconscionable. It was impossible, un-American.

The cries that went up with the publication of the new book were little short of murderous. Kinsey was raking away cherished moral fiber by mucking about in realms where people had no business. Across the nation, across (in particular) Indiana, a state not heretofore known for its adventurousness with regard to sexual matters, pulpits promised dire consequences for Dr. Kinsey. Those faculty members at Indiana University who had opposed the formation of the Institute moaned that they had known, all along, this would happen. Even Margaret Mead felt compelled to criticize, elliptically stating that "the sudden removal of a previously guaranteed reticence has left many young people singularly defenseless in just those areas where their desire to conform was protected by a lack of knowledge of the extent of nonconformity." That is, so long as young people didn't know that other couples were breaking or bending the codes of accepted sexual behavior, they would go along more or less unhappily fitting their libidos into morally acceptable positions.

Editorials were rife. While the university stoutly defended the Institute, passionate, thrilling speeches were delivered from the House floor. Joe McCarthy scowled. Anyone could see what was coming. Already, in 1950, U.S. Customs agents had begun seizing packages bound for the Institute's archives, items donated or purchased with the proceeds from the book, on the grounds that they were pornographic, nasty—the sort of thing with which Americans need have no truck. In 1954 the Rockefeller Foundation withdrew its support from the Institute.

There followed a long quiet period. Alfred Kinsey died in 1956, and it's said with no hidden bitterness by those who worked with him that the hysteria and spite that spread in the wake of the second book caused his emotional and physical breakdown. The year after his death the Supreme Court ruled that the Customs agency had no authority over private packages addressed to a private, scholarly foundation. Funding, which had been subsisting on income from the (still brisk) sales of books, was quietly picked up again by the National Institute for Mental Health, the National Science Foundation—by America's bastions of scientific respectability. And for many years, no one except specialists heard anything more from the Kinsey Institute.

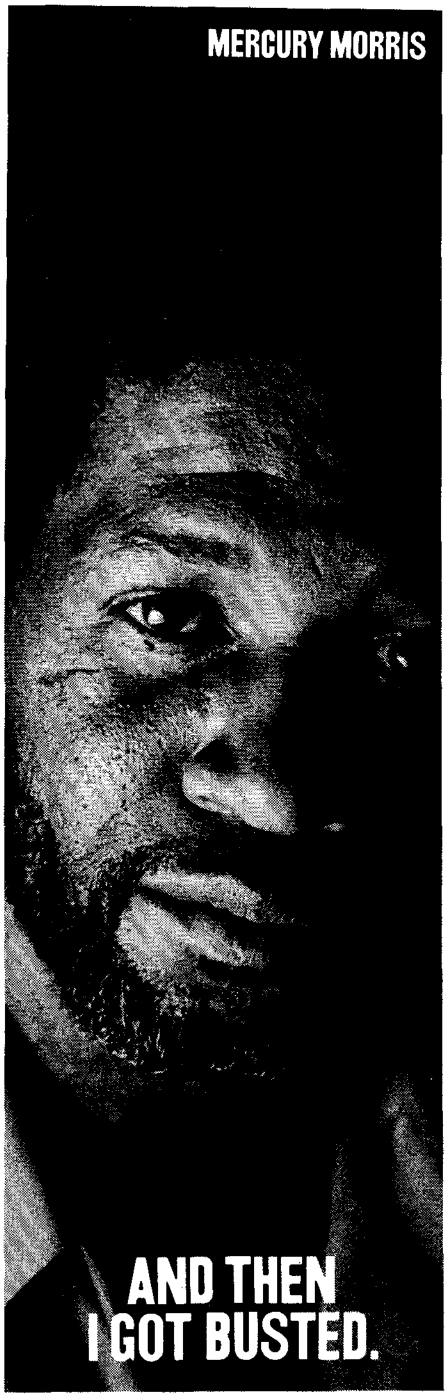
Paul Gebhard, who became director of the Institute upon Kinsey's death, made the years from 1956 to 1982 a period of retrenchment and consolidation that he saw as necessary. Under his direction the Institute went about its scholarly business with an utter absence of public folderol. Information was collected in areas the Institute had not turned to before—pregnancy and abortion, sex offenders, homosexuality—and books were quietly produced. An Information Service was quietly established to allow access, by mail and telephone, to the Institute's extraordinary files, library, and other resources, and word of this service was quietly passed in academic circles. Perhaps most important of all, additions to the Institute's archives quietly continued apace.

America had made it clear that sexuality was not fit for public discussion; it was a private, unfortunate business. And so the Institute, which had learned its lessons painfully and publicly, was working with great stillness and care. In the tradition of any scholarly endeavor, the researchers at the Institute lost themselves in their work, and when they glanced up again, the rest of America was shouting excitedly about its sexual revolution.

Who could blame them for finding bitter humor? Love was abruptly free and good and to be made at every opportunity, it was said—often, noisily—that nothing pleasurable could be abnormal; middle-class America announced that it was shaking off repressive shackles with a vengeance. And here was the Kinsey Institute doing tedious library work on behavior when it could be out joining the party. The Institute and American society were at odds again, but both sides had jumped the fence. No longer the dangerous, subversive threat of the 1950s, the Institute, with its endless studies, had become the bastion of fuddiduddiness. While America was ready to swing, the Institute burrowed deeper into its research, its archives, its annals. Who, by the 1970s, remembered the Institute at all?

Indiana University had never for a moment forgotten it. The years of careful research, the grants obtained, the books produced—none of this had escaped the notice of the University. Far from the embarrassment feared by short-sighted faculty of the 'fifties, the Institute had emerged as a source of pride for university administration and trustees, had become an academic plume. Had become, in fact, a showpiece. Scholars were coming from around the world to confer with Kinsey researchers, and the archival collection of erotic art and artifacts had no peer. By the late 1970s, when Gebhard's retirement was nearing, it became clear that it was time to show the Institute off.

The University and the Institute's Board of Trustees began to look for a new director. They had in mind someone who could turn the Institute in a different direction, bring it again into the limelight. They wanted the Institute—and by extension, its far-sighted University—to be seen as a haven for serious, indeed ground-breaking research. They wanted a director who would give the Institute's revelations more publicity, now that America was prepared to discuss sexuality in the broad light of day. They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Reinisch's academic and scholarly credentials were certainly extensive enough to satisfy any academic snob. She was a psychologist whose special area of interest was the prenatal effects of hormones on sexual development, her work had been funded by the Ford Foundation, the NIMH, the National Science Foundation, and she was respected by her colleagues as a thorough and imaginative researcher. But more than that, she brought a non-academic eclecticism to the Institute that could hardly be paralleled; she had taught elementary school, counseled children, trained dolphins for *Flipper* and stage-managed Peaches & Herb and Sly and the Family Stone. Who could vie with credentials like those? She was the director made to order, capable of bringing the Institute back to the forefront of American life.

Reinisch understood this, and changes began soon after she took over. The Institute began to branch into new areas of research such as psychobiology and biomedicine, reflecting not only Reinisch's interests but also the current tenor of the scientific community. The Institute's name, originally the "Institute for Sex Research" and heightened to the "Alfred C. Kinsey Institute for Sex Research, Inc." on the 25th anniversary of Kinsey's death, became "The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction." Even poor, shabby Morrison Hall, longtime home for the Institute in the oldest section of the campus, was gutted and set to be refurbished with classy and spacious accommodations for Kinsey staff, visiting researchers, and the ever-growing archives.

Reinisch's voice began to be heard—in lectures, interviews, articles appearing in everything from *Cosmopolitan* to *Omni*. "People have to know," she insisted over and over. "They know they can come to the Institute for answers." And come they did, letters streaming onto the secretaries' desks about everything from impotence to abortion. Turns out people remembered the Institute after all.

"Where else were they going to go?" Reinisch says now. "Sex education is infrequent and inadequate. Even MDs aren't adequate—often they've only had a two-week course on sexuality themselves, so they don't know any more than their patients do. *Playboy* and *Penthouse* can't afford the kind of research we can do, and the library's too scary—who's going to walk up to the desk and say, 'Excuse me, I need a book on penis size?'"

It was with this in mind that Reinisch launched the most public Kinsey venture since *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, a syndicated newspaper column called "The Kinsey Report." The column invites questions, and the letters are heaped in the Institute offices—on hormones (do men have estrogen? Doesn't that make them weak?), PMS (does it exist?), obscene phone callers (including those who say they're calling from the Kinsey Institute), rape (is it possible between husband and wife?), impregnation (can it occur in the bathtub?). Reinisch writes the column personally, seeing it as education. It's education that she sees as the only answer to staggering ignorance about sexuality throughout our society.

Staggering ignorance? In America today? What about the 'sixties? What about the sexual revolution? Reinisch says, "What sexual revolution?

"The *media* are more knowledgeable and sophisticated about sex, not people. Otherwise how could we have people writing and asking when the fertile periods are for women?" Hence the column, the magazine and radio interviews, the lectures and appearances. She would miss no opportunity for enlightenment. "This is not different from what Kinsey did," she says. "The whole point is to get the information to people."

But this is Indiana, a church-choked state. Indiana, where even the suggestion of sex education has been ridden out of most school districts south of Indianapolis. Indiana, home territory of such school-prayer and traditional-morality champions as Daniel Manion. Indiana ranks 50th of the states in per capita education spending; what room is there here for societal sex education, however necessary?

"*Clergy* use our columns in pastoral matters," Reinisch shoots back. "We get letters, thanking us. High school teachers. Our mail runs 1% negative—.5% outside the U.S. We don't even get the crazy letters."

The point is one of relevance, and the Institute, Reinisch says, is "as relevant to the Moral Majority as it is to the LSD generation. People need facts to make informed decisions, and we make those facts available." If anything, Reinisch sees the Institute existing respectfully beside traditional religion and morality. "Religious principles," she says, "can stand on their own. We're not here to promote anything. We're here so people can make their own judgments based on facts."

It's this, of course, that makes the idea of the Institute frightening. All very well to talk about judgments based on facts, but Reinisch isn't facing the spectre of her own children in everlasting torment for practices they might never have imagined without a newspaper column, without a Kinsey Institute. It may well be that people all over the United States are having sex with multiple partners or upside down, for all we know, but surely it cannot do our children anything but harm to hear about this, inflaming their imaginations and setting their endocrine systems into overdrive.

The difficulty is that there *is* some information afoot. We live in an age awash with sexual presumptions and allusions from every media front, and The Kinsey Report couldn't exist if people weren't uncertain enough to ask questions about everything from AIDS to birthing procedures. No one is doing young America any favor by restricting its understanding of sexuality to prime-time TV and Donahue. At least, Reinisch argues, the column is an opportunity to insert truth into the general broth, that truth which makes us free.

Apparently, against all bets, even the most fundamental Hoosiers agree. When the editor of the local paper in notoriously conservative Evansville was prevailed upon to remove the column from his pages, he appealed to his readers, promising to abide by their decree. The decree came in rapidly, and in abundance. Letter after letter, far more than he could hope to run, appealed to keep the column. "This is not pornography. This is education," they said, one after the other. How could he think of letting The Kinsey Report go? It was the best thing in the paper.

Clearly Reinisch has support in her assessment of America's needs today, and she is tailoring the Institute accordingly. Academic and media-oriented, protean, it is consistently reaching out, presenting itself in its creamy brochures and pam-

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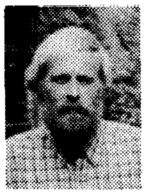
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phlets and through its lively director as a serious, public resource. Has it, in fact, come down entirely from its ivory tower, become a place for all America to lay claim to?

Yes and no. Research is being carried on at a blistering pace in a dozen directions. A book called *Masculine/Feminine: Basic Perspectives* is in the works, with other books planned on adolescence, reproductive hormones and their affect in females, and gender-related vulnerabilities. Research is being carried on in prenatal development, reproductive cycles (including attitudes to menstruation), a history of early European sexologists, and the differences in suicide attempts—and their rates of success—between heterosexuals and homosexuals. Most of this work is aimed for a scholarly, scientific audience, and dissemination of findings will probably be slow.

Then there is the Kinsey Summer Institute, a one-week gathering in the Indiana heat, professionals assembled to discuss topics such as the Sexual Behavior of Couples, Sex and Aging: Physiologic Perspective, Stresses of Dealing with Sexual Issues, and Dysfunctions and Disabilities. (Last year Reinisch's presentation was on Media and Sexuality.) Like much of the Institute's research, these Summer Institute presentations are targeted for professionals, "not for the bag boy at the grocery store. They are for all kinds of health professionals, or for any professional—media, teaching—with a legitimate interest in the field. They are graduate level." In other words, dry.

On the other hand, there is the continuing and increasingly ponderous presence of the Kinsey Institute archives. Begun by Kinsey in the 'forties, the archives hold erotica from every continent and most cultures, from kings, nobles and gentry dating from 5000 B.C. They contain over 64,000 books—running the gamut from scientific journals to first editions of novels—the data bases from several surveys and personal interviews (including, of course, Kinsey's own original interviews), films, photographs, and sculptures. There are paintings and lithographs by Renoir, Chagall, and Beardsley, Chinese scrolls on lovemaking, flip books and a chastity belt. While the public is not free to rummage through the holdings, tours are regularly scheduled by the Institute, and Reinisch is hoping perhaps to open a public gallery downstairs—she would make, she is quick to add, decisions with the community as to the appropriateness of material displayed. It's just that there's so much, and people really ought to be able to see. "After all," she says. "We have a Renoir."

Not only do they have a Renoir, they have diaries and letters from hundreds of sources. Many of these, we are given to understand, are from well-known, perhaps notorious public figures, but this is by no means the bulk of the collection. Often boxes stuffed with love letters or diaries come to the Institute from people who, seeing they can't pass on diaries or love letters to their children, still can't make themselves throw them away. Years, after all, of intimacy and, ideally, love. So the letters and diaries and journals arrive at the Institute, where they are kept and the contributor's wishes are respected—some materials sealed for 30 or 50 years, some until the deaths of all the contributor's children. "We're very interested in what the common man is doing," says Reinisch, "so we're very happy to receive these."

Wayne Hogan

She admits that one of her favorite contributions to the archives came over the transom one day: A box stuffed with hundreds of photographs a husband and wife had taken of themselves and each other, nude, throughout the forty years of their marriage. "So it became a kind of chronicle of their marriage," says Reinisch. "It was very touching. But when one partner died, the other wondered where the photos should go. They obviously couldn't go to the children." And the Institute was happy to receive them.

A reminder: Readers curious to know when their subscriptions expire should note the four-digit number in the upper right corner of the NAR mailing label. The first three digits indicate volume number, the final digit, the issue date. This is volume 272, issue number 1 (March); the June 1987 issue will be volume 272, issue number 2, etc.

From the holdings, of course, scholars can learn more about fetishes, censorship and ritual, and that information can be brought forward for the good of the community. What do the flip books of the '30s suggest about the desires and ambitions of the people who bought them? What is emphasized in the erotic art of the courts of sixteenth-Century Japan? How do our anxieties and social stirrings translate into our erotica, or even into the nature of our sexual desires? At the most profound level, the study of sexuality is the study of ourselves, our fears and needs. This is not the work of titillation, but the psychoanalysis of entire cultures. And so Reinisch, in her relentless insistence that information open out in order to be of any benefit, is insisting that we must confront ourselves.

And at every turn she is met with overwhelming thanks from a society apparently ravenous for this information. It's disconcerting to hear this. It's embarrassing to have passed through a revolution and discover that we didn't really revolt at all—that as a society we know little more than we did in 1948. Still the letters come in by the thousands—impotence, breast size, dreams, abuse. Has America fooled itself so thoroughly? Reinisch would say yes. But she would also say that the admission of ignorance is the beginning of wisdom, and we desperately need wisdom.

Just as the shrillest of the Institute's 1950s opponents feared, the Institute is reaching down and rooting itself in every aspect of American culture and personality—even the churches. Just as they feared, it has taken on the cloak of respectability, and so is allowed in every home. It is dictating behaviors and attitudes, it is promulgating secular humanism. It is the repository for a wealth of human imagination and ambition, it is a gathering place for those whose knowledge is arcane and perhaps frightening. It carries on unhindered in its speaking and writing and researching, and there appears no help for it. Slowly, ponderously, the sexual revolution is starting to take place. ☐

■

Stopover

Velleity on New Zealand's North Island

SUSAN BERGMAN

In the kiwi capital of the world on Sunday evening, the man at the door of TePuke Baptist Church greets you in the name of the Lord. Sixty or so people in shorts and t-shirts are singing "Worthy the Lamb that Was Slain," lifting their hands above their shoulders with their eyes closed. You can slip into the back row and listen to an unlikely combination of instruments—electric mandolin, organ, piano, saxophone, guitar, and drums with cymbals—as they twang and wail at their own pace to the chorus shone up on a screen from an overhead projector. These folks must know something about lambs. All the way across New Zealand from Aukland through Hamilton, over to Lake Rotorua and north toward the Bay of Plenty, the hills spill over with woolly surplus. Seventy-three million to three: sheep to people, seems to be the accepted figure here. Up and down the sides of steep volcanic outcroppings, the majority tends its fertile pasture land like conscientious greenskeepers.

On my way home from a two-week stay in Australia, I had planned a stopover in New Zealand where I hoped to visit some native islanders. Until now, the only Maoris I had encountered, 90% of whom live on the North Island, had been in the same predicament many Amerindians are in, obviously unemployed and notorious for their inability to handle liquor; or on stage for tourists in the garish Tudor mansion at Rotorua that during its Victorian heyday had served as bathhouse and thermal spa for the rheumatic. There, thick-hipped women translated poetic songs of welcome and farewell into rhythmic twirling of balls on strings. Flaccid men in fierce "haka pukan" postures frightened their phantom enemies with grimaces, rolling eyes and tongue thrusts, the over-rehearsed contortions second only in authenticity to a meal of steam-cooked lamb and "kumara" (sweet potato). I think for some reason I had expected unspoiled villages of wood-carvers clad in brightly colored mumus, more like Gauguin's version of the South Pacific than a sideshow of assimilation. I had hoped to see some remnant tatoos that this culture had once used to embellish their faces and buttocks.

In this cement block basilica with orange carpeting and tinted windows, a dozen clean-cut Polynesians occupy the back two rows of folding chairs, and if I don't get a hearty welcome, at least they make room for someone only a little newer at this than they are. Behind a rustic cross, a sagging green curtain hides the baptistery on the center front wall where most of the people here have gone under and come back to live another kind of life. According to one story I am told after the service, the biggest dealer in Te Puke Thunder (marijuana grows as excessively as sheep in these regions) has just turned over a new leaf. He sits laughing at all the minister's jokes. They say that before the missionaries arrived in New Zealand and wrote down the Maori language, the art of oratory passed on tribal culture and tradition—places the mountains walked, the way their tears became streams and rivers. He can appreciate this new, animated telling of miracles.

On the other side of the world they talk about sending missionaries to America as well as to tiny islands with 90 localized languages. One woman who seemed eager to shake my hand has just come back from two years of service in Colorado. In the church's newsletter, a doctor in Irian Jaya writes that the Dani women are beginning to bring their mal-nourished babies to the feeding clinic. From the Solomon Islands Mr. Cottle compared a year there to a ride in an outboard motor canoe. And have you ever visited Brahmanbaria?

All this to say that when traveling in a foreign country on a Sunday, one of the best places I have found to meet a cross-section of the locals, is the corner church. Everything else is closed in New Zealand, down to Preston's Kiwifruit Winery. The ruddy Dutch mandolin player stops to find out where I came from before he pats his instrument case and heads for home.

On the way to Mount Maunganui, a resort town on the Bay of Plenty where I plan to spend the night, past signs for Black Doris Plums and row after row of tall hybrid willows that act as wind blocks for the kiwifruit, I can still smell the sulfur on my hands from holding them over the boiling mud around Lake Rotorua to see how hot this gulping phenomenon really was. Hot enough to boil.

Local authorities have fenced off the more dangerous holes in the ground and made parks where hot springs gurgle their way to the surface and busloads of tourists pile out to have a look. For whatever reason, people as gullible as I have come from all over the world to see what 212 degrees occurring naturally looks and feels like. Neon signs spice up the place. A tram going to the top of a hill provides the same scenic view of the lake you have just seen from the top of the hill in your car. The underground activity of non-extinct volcanoes, dressed up and for sale, is as much a natural high as letting your eggs rot.

The juke box at the last open fast-food stand in "The Mount" blasts "Who's Zoomin' Who" as I pull up. They're out of everything. Closing time, but they fix me a toasted ham and cheese sandwich and fill a paper sack with leftover fries before locking the gate behind me. Nine o'clock on a summer night in a beach town, and everyone but a security guard on rounds must be in bed. I find a motel with a phone and call Evan Stubbs, president of the New Zealand Canoe Association, to see if he can set me up

RICHARD ROBBINS

MAY ON THE WINTERED-OVER GROUND

Automatic as the amen of chard
gone rhubarb-red to seed, I again sit
and again feel for the easing of knots
I bound myself with without my knowing.
Amen to the small death strokes inside,
to their minority, to my more-than-
50-percent wanting to flourish
despite the strain easing more slowly now,

slow as whole days. On my knees in the garden,
I tear second-generation weeds from root
and willing earth. On the dark, unsure ground
where spirit grows its wheat, I kneel slowly
down. Stars do not come out inside the chest.
Work, love, song are the sound of the chemical
hoe and nighttime angel moving hill
to small spinach hill, preparing my yield.

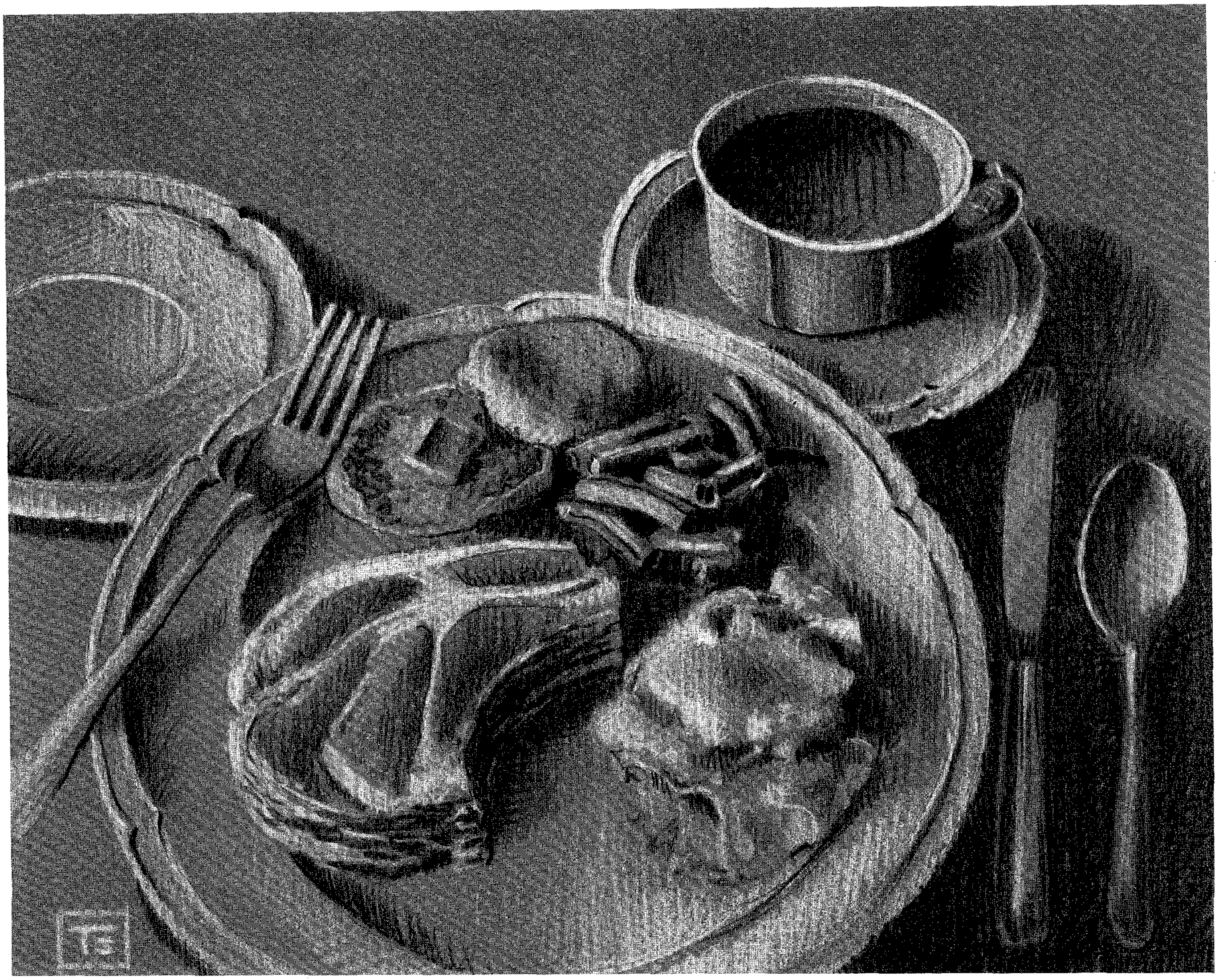
with a whitewater guide for the Rangitaiki River. Must be my pronunciation, but he gives me the name of Max Grant who makes plastic canoes in Palmerston North and is president of the Ruahine white water club, opposite end of the island. Max tells me that Bill Ross, the milkman in Mt. Monganui, will be very helpful if he can get off work. Barbara and Barry Anderson will supply the kayaks if I know at all what I'm doing. Their specialty is four-day outings for groups on any river worth riding. They supply the transportation, boats, food—she makes a biscuit-type thing with rolled oats and nuts, for energy, mostly dehydrated fare. "All the tucker," as she puts it, "and a bit of tuition." You bring a good woolly jersey.

But if I am to make my 9:30 flight out of Aukland, we can't figure out a way to fit in there, back, down the river, and to the airport. The weather is perfect. Bill suggests the beach and a longer stay next time. I'm disappointed, but I can accept reality, I say. He says, "They go together don't they?" The day on Waihi Beach is a stroke of luck. Almost deserted in February, it rivals any tropical beach, without the crowds. Extending almost five miles between two volcanic peaks, the caramel colored sand is strung with a necklace of shells. To the right you see the peaks of Matakana Island and straight ahead Mayor Island rises like a camel's back. One old beachcomber complete with sagging belly stops to draw maps in the sand for me with his walking stick. He rummages his way along the leavings of the sea to find a set of false teeth the surf knocked out of someone's mouth yesterday. "They get washed up you know. Used to keep a store in town and never was a time without at least four dentures in the drawer." He mixes in shark stories with accounts of his fishing prowess. He tells me all about the money prize Zane Grey set up for the biggest yellow fin (he thinks it is), maybe swordfish, caught off Mayor Island, 22 miles out. Over here's White Island—he rearranges his dot in the geography and trails imaginary lava out of its center. He erases two lines with his big toe to make Tauranga Harbor narrower. "Right here," he digs his stick in, "we just lost a fellow. Tipped his boat and drowned."

I take his picture: that need to keep something you can't, to wind a place's beliefs, vagaries, possibilities 'round and around you until when you finally must let go, it will pull your memories back to it like a yo-yo. With my towel spread next to my clothes, I line up the fist-sized whelks beside one starfish and the heart shaped cockles. Enough for everyone who isn't here.

Actually, my entire brief exposure to the North Island of New Zealand leaves me with the impression of the people being somewhere else. When I flew into Aukland from Sydney on Saturday night, the bellboy at the Regent had to draw a map on the blotter paper of my desk to direct me to an open eatery. The hotel kitchens closed at 10:00. He wondered if I had ever seen Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, where he had gone for a summer as a missionary (I'm not making this up) for the Mormon Church! Queen Street looks like the main drag. Every second shop sells sheepskin seat covers. In one window with an array of collectibles, there hangs a greenstone tiki (talisman) in the common form of a fetus. You wear it around your neck for good luck, a charm you feel certain will come to mean something more to you. Teenagers swarm up and down the avenue to and from the harbor. They lean against parked cars the way their counterparts do in Elkhart, Indiana on a cruising Saturday. Up a side street *Cheers* glares in neon, a bright Americanesque watering hole that serves peach daiquiris, homemade rolls with whipped butter, and cold pates with baked potatoes. The waiter has a handsomely chiseled face and an earring in one ear. He doesn't comment on my accent. It must be 10:00 Sydney time, midnight here, ? o'clock at home. I've lost track.

A two day stopover anyplace is like heading for the Grand Canyon and only making it as far as the fireworks stand. Dazzling, the particulars of pyrotechnics, but . . . You read the travel books when you get home like a kick in the pants. You place your souvenirs like stations on the road to worlds to come—a shell for the intricate whorls of experience you will one day wind through, a matchbook to ignite the flavors of one fragrant fish house, those teeth, a laugh each time you open your drawer, at a world too big to bite off all at once. □



INLAND

Pamela Erbe

My dad harvested our backyard lagoon as if it were the loamy soil of the Midwest, which he had never seen. He'd been to Florida and Washington, D.C., and to the Pacific courtesy of the Navy in the second World War. But when an issue of the *National Geographic* featured a profile of a Midwestern state, he lingered over the photographs of furrows and tractors for long hours, reciting the agricultural statistics to my mother and me. Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois, Iowa—the Indian names took on a fevered, mysterious luster in my mind. "In the flood plain of the Mississippi River," he recounted, "the topsoil goes so deep that if you stuck your arm in it up to the shoulder, your fingers would still be in topsoil. And black," he said, "black as oil." I thought of that part of the country as a place where dirt banked up like snow and people had to dig themselves out.

He made do with what he had. He plucked cherrystone clams from the salt muck as if they were crookneck squash, gathered blue crabs like the Big Boy tomatoes he had once lugged into the house in bushel baskets. Spot, flounder, bluefish he caught were set in buckets on the dock, where he had constructed from plywood a cleaning stand that looked like a podium. Standing at it, he slit the silver ovals of the fish bodies with his sharp knife, cut off the heads and tails with two quick snaps of his wrist, gutted the fish, and tossed the offal into the water.

The gulls, as if they had some avian radar trained at all times on my dad's favorite spot, would arrive and spin in noisy cyclones over his head, then dive for the red fish guts, the shimmer of tails and heads, which floated for awhile and made easy targets. Dad stood in the midst of the melee, his hands glittering with the sequins of fish scales and moving like those of a conductor, deft, quick, precise, his face set in a peaceful concentration while the birds wheeled and screamed. He didn't mind that they grabbed what he meant for the crabs. "Everything's got to live," he'd say. "Everything feeds everything else. Plenty for everybody." A man of no religion, he was devoted to the ecological cycles in which creatures ate other creatures and the waste fed new life. My mother complained that the gulls soiled the dock, the boat, her laundry.

Once he had had a real garden. That was before my mother convinced him to buy the summer cottage in Delaware. I have dim memories, still pictures like old snaps, of Dad in his heavy winter jacket, a hat with earflaps stuck on his head, moving behind the tiller, a squat, dangerous-looking thing, like a toothy animal eager to bite the hard ground. I can see the flaps blown back from his head like hound leather and the bursts of steam from his mouth. There is the arc of his damp, brown back between rows of high corn as he bends to pull weeds and cultivate around the maturing stems. And his face when he comes through the screen door, stamping dirt from his unlaced sneakers, carrying bowls and baskets of string beans, limas, tomatoes, Silver Queen corn. Green peppers as big as grapefruit. Yellow onions with dirt still clinging to their hairy roots. Cucumbers and yellow squash, beets and kale.

My dad did not believe in chemical solutions, but in dead leaves and compost and the thoughtful placement of marigolds and elephant garlic and other plants that gave off odors to discourage what he called "varmints." My mother and I did our part by seeing to it that no morsel of usable garbage went to waste in the trash. I carefully separated rinds and peels, egg shells, old soup to be mixed with the grass clippings and leaves. When there was snow on the ground and the air was ice-cold, my dad liked to take me into the far reaches of the back yard and poke his pitchfork into the compost until steam came out. This trick of his never failed to produce amazement in me and a sense that he was something of an avatar, some cereal god returned for unimaginable reasons to a Philadelphia suburb, where he performed the magic of prodding the winter earth into heat and producing perfect, unblemished tomatoes as big and smooth as softballs. He would explain about the bacteria at work, about the rightness of decay in the grand scheme of things, and I wouldn't listen. I didn't want to know about the waste heat of working microbes. I wanted to be dazzled, and to press up against his wool work pants and be thankful for him.

"It bites back!" is what he told me I said the first time he picked a tomato off the vine, wiped it on his Bermudas, tapped a little salt on it from a shaker carried deep in his pocket, and handed it to me. I remember laughing with my mouth full of warm tomato pulp and the juice running down my chin onto my halter top. He was proud of my ability to distinguish, at three, the acid tang of a real tomato from the storebought kind, the hard, pinkish spheres that came three to an oblong plastic basket wrapped in cellophane. Cubes of these went into our winter salads. "For color," my mother said, but they were always left in a puddle of oil and vinegar at the bottom of the bowl because only my mother would put them in her mouth. And she ate them defiantly. "These are unusually good tomatoes," she would announce, daring us to eat. Once in awhile, I'd slide a cube into my mouth in case she was right. It never had any taste at all, and often as not, it crunched. My dad never succumbed to this treachery.

Both my parents taught school, so there was no reason not to close up the house in June for the summer—no reason except that my dad could no longer have a garden. Our shore cottage was built on the sandy fill from the salt marsh, dirt that supported the weight of the house and the growth of only the toughest weeds.

It was my mother who lobbied for it, who insisted she needed a "complete vacation" in the summer, to get out of town and away from the pressures that dogged her the rest of the year. My mother was intense about every single thing, and the strain told. While my dad taught his shop classes and came home to the quiet of his garden or his basement wood shop in winter, my mother balled up her emotional fists and fought. She fought parents who didn't care whether their kids did their homework, kids who didn't care to learn the difference between dependent and independent clauses, her principal (known as That Idiot), her district superintendent (The Moron), and the perpetrators of daily city annoyances—bad drivers, rude sales clerks, supermarket checkers who rang up six cans of peas when she had five.

In the summer, once we had the cottage, there was nothing and no one to fight. My dad could not overlook the salubrious effects of sun and ocean and quiet, and in a way he gave up his garden for this seasonal rebirth that eased the lines in her face and the tightness in her neck. At the shore, she went gradually from a pack and a half of Pall Malls a day to an occasional cigarette when people came for drinks and to a ritual after-dinner smoke.

My dad made one attempt at invoking the garden spirits in Delaware. Behind the house, as far from the lagoon as he could get and not be in the house's shadow, he built a raised bed from cinder blocks. He filled it with topsoil and worked organic fertilizer into it. The seedlings of the hardiest tomato variety he could find were thriving, bright green and hairy, in the egg cartons on the kitchen window sill, and he placed them in the bed. They spread their slender-fingered leaves and grew straight up until the first white blossoms appeared. Then they went yellow, curled inward, and died.

My mother kept those dead plants alive long after the bed had been dismantled and the topsoil washed into the lagoon. Dad directed his energies toward his clam bed and crab traps. When company came, he got into his swim trunks and loped across the yard, an aluminum pot clutched in one hand. He eased into the water until he was hip-deep, then twisted from side to side, digging his feet into the muck until his toes touched a clamshell, when he'd duck down and dig it out with his hand. While this went on, my mother and the guests sat on the back porch, drinking Ballantines, and my mother told about the tomato experiment. While he dug up our food, they all laughed together over his foolishness.

At the kitchen counter, he chopped strips of bacon and grated Parmesan off a brick-sized block, minced a little garlic, and decked out the clams for the broiler. When he took the trays of bubbling clams out to the porch and we gobbled them down and people said, "Lou, you are the unsurpassed king of clams casino," he was nearly as happy as when he had stood in our kitchen at home and pulled husks and silk off his own just-picked corn, with the water simmering behind him, ready to boil the fresh ears just three minutes, no longer.

The first time I saw Lake Michigan was on a summer Friday after I had lived within an hour's drive of its shores for three years. When I was small, my father gave me a puzzle, a map of the United States with each state a different piece of brightly colored plastic. The easiest ones to place were the border states with odd shapes—Texas with its clamlike foot stuck down into Mexico, the peninsula of Florida, the knob of Maine. And the states around the blue blobs of the Great Lakes. The lakes were responsible for Michigan's interesting shape, a left-handed mitten waving at Canada, but the lakes themselves were just blue clues on a map.

Where I came from, lakes were small things, little circles of water you could see across. In the Midwest, everything was backwards. What we called lakes in the east were called "ponds," and what we called towns were "cities." I lived in one of those and never got used to hearing people refer to it as "the city." It was no bigger than the suburb where I grew up and as non-descript. But it wasn't there that I saw Lake Michigan. It was in Chicago.

As we drove, Tim told me about the first time he'd gone, when he was a high school freshman. It was a band trip. He played clarinet. "We marched in Soldier Field," he said with fourteen-year-old-pride, though he was thirty-two.

Tim and I had lived together for four years. When he suggested Chicago for a three-day weekend, my first thought was that three days would mean a hopelessly weedy garden when we got home. "It hasn't occurred to you yet that the soil here is so bad that not even weeds will grow much in three days, has it?" He gave the greyish, pebbly dirt of our yard a contemptuous kick with the toe of his loafer.

It had been a shock to find that a man who had grown up in Iowa didn't want a garden. "What would I want with a garden?" he said the first spring after we bought the house. That house sat on a flat half-acre. I had the plot all mapped out.

"Iowa," I said like a ritual chant, something that might produce green shoots and cooperation if intoned often enough. I shrugged.

Tim grimaced. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I figured anyone from Iowa would have a garden," I said. I pulled a packet of seeds for giant purple string beans out of the rack in the supermarket. "Didn't you have one when you were growing up?"

"Yes," he said and maneuvered the cart around me and the seed packets toward frozen foods. "I hated it." When I asked why, he said, "Because I had to work in it when everybody else was on the golf course or playing baseball." Into the cart he dropped frozen fried chicken, spinach, peas.

"You must have liked the taste of the food at least," I said.

He tossed two boxes of frozen French bread pizza with everything into the cart. I tried not to frown, but when he stopped in front of frozen potatoes, I said no. "If you want French fries, we'll make them," I said.

"We raised stuff to sell," he told me. "Strawberries. Acres of the damn things. And corn."

"Didn't you get to eat any?"

"Yeah. So?" He picked up a half-gallon of ice cream and challenged me with a look before placing it in the cart. I didn't say a word. "I'd just as soon buy from the farmers' market," he said, moving on. "It's cheaper than growing your own."

"I want a garden," I said.

I had lived in cities all my life. When I met Tim at an antiquarian book fair in New York, when we began trading long-distance phone calls, then visits, when he suggested finally that I might like to give the Midwest a try and I had packed up and moved out here, a garden was the first thing I thought of. Michigan turned out to be not much like the Midwest my dad had studied reverently in the *National Geographic*. The dirt was rarely black and the main crops grew either on trees or, like celery, in boggy patches. But here I was, living inland, having abandoned the ocean for love, and I would have a garden.

"Fine," Tim said, "Have one." I watched his back swing around the lobster tank and into the pet food and paper articles aisle, and with him and the cartful of frozen food vanished my dreams of the two of us, brown shoulder to brown shoulder, hunched over our seedlings, picking tomatoes and peppers before the warm, musky earth aroma sent us into the cool bedroom to make love before eating the salad we'd grown.

I did it all myself except the first tilling, which I coerced Tim into doing with a rented tiller, displaying my woman's arms and smooth hands as if they were vestigial organs. In exchange for his performing this odious chore, I agreed to get up when the grass was still dewy and spread weed killer and fertilizer over the lawn we were trying to grow while he slept in. Three times.

So we were driving to Chicago on a hot morning, to a reservation at the Palmer House, tickets to a baseball game and a play, and plans to eat in the best French restaurant we could find. The interstate moved through the humid orchards and flatness of Michigan and Indiana, skirted some high dunes, then swung into a stretch of industrial wretchedness as immense as that of northern New Jersey. We drove past an enormous, reeking landfill, hills out of which pipes protruded every so many yards to let off gas. The air was yellow, then it was grey, and we were in the city, el cars running alongside us. Tim was searching his memory for the answer to my question about who Dan Ryan was when the car swung off to the right, we rounded a turn, and there it was. The city jutted up, a crenelated backdrop to our left, and to the right was just water. Flat water with no waves, water like a blue sheet fitted over the rounded edges of the horizon. I couldn't believe it was so big.

Relieved that I'd forgotten about Dan Ryan, Tim said, "Why do you think they're called *Great* Lakes?" and "Do you think you lose the *Edmund Fitzgerald* in a duck pond?"

On Sunday we walked on beaches right in the city. It felt wrong to me. Beaches and cities were separate things, large bodies of water were salt. "You people from the east kill me," Tim said and launched into his standard tirade about how East Coast people thought they were so sophisticated but were actually more provincial than anybody. I only half listened. I'd heard it all before. I was looking at that lake, and resenting it. It was, after all, only a lake. An imposter masquerading as an ocean, Chicagoans willing accomplices in the fraud.

Tim got sick on the clams casino. Or so he said. None of the rest of us did. I knew my father so well—I could feel that he was just the tiniest bit pleased at this nasty turn of events and his possible part in it. My dad didn't know about Tim. He kept trying to get him to talk. "Tell me about Iowa. Tell me all about it," he'd urge, like a child begging for a tall tale, something to amaze and stupefy.

Tim shrugged. "Pigs, corn, soybeans," he said. "What else do you want to know?"

This kind of remark, delivered with an unmistakable smirk, stung my dad, who was rooting after mythology—tales of world record vegetables and black topsoil up to your shoulder and finding fiery green shoots in the morning after you'd carelessly flung some seeds onto the earth the day before. Something along the lines of a postcard I'd sent him from Iowa—a trick photograph of a flatbed truck, the entire bed taken up with one gigantic ear of corn. Tim's reticence made my dad think of him as something of a lunkhead.

But I also knew Tim, and I knew that he misinterpreted because of his profound inferiority around easterners. It was partly his experiences with East Coast antiquarians when he had decided to forget about teaching and put his Ph.D. in Renaissance literature to work in a more businesslike way. The established antiquarians looked down their bespectacled noses at him in his nice Harris tweed and loafers; at thirty-two, he looked about twenty-five. And healthy. And he was such a pigeon, set upon by every breed of New York jive and con artist, mugger, and punk. A cab driver circled all of Central Park in taking him from East 72nd to West 81st. He was giving my dad the answers he had learned East Coast people wanted to hear—answers that shored up their impressions of the Midwest as one vast farm peopled with inbred halfwits who chewed wheatstalks and thought a high time was an evening of square dancing and watching cattle mate.

I tried to mediate. I explained the problem to my father, I tried to convince Tim of my dad's love of earth and crops. But they had taken a dislike to each other that nothing could fix. My father, for one thing, was suspicious of a man who would live with a woman and not marry her. Tim thought my dad was a milquetoast because he took so much abuse from my mother.

Retired from teaching, installed permanently at the summer cottage, my mother had made my father the target of the anger she hadn't disposed of. It seemed there was actually more of it—as if each of those vicious words discharged over the years had contained a small seed of rage that had blossomed into a furious flower. My dad lived in a vast garden of them. They bloomed all year around. Her conversations were pocked with references to his failures—how he'd never gotten into administration, his failure at making grass grow in the marshy yard, his slow work on the expansion of the cottage. When Tim got sick on the clams, she seemed satisfied, as if she had known all along that anything my dad did would yield trouble, sooner or later.

"Daddy," I said to him one night on the screened porch, "why do you put up with it?" Tim had gone down to Baltimore to meet with a client and my mother was at a town meeting where she would have something to say about some proposed development. Dad had made dinner—crabcakes, French fries, cole slaw—and I had done the dishes. We sat out back with a citronella candle burning on a TV tray, the two of us sipping brandy and not saying much. I just blurted the question out—I was feeling sorry for him because my mother, with a captive audience for the past few days, had been unusually vituperative. I expected a brief non-answer. "Put up with what?" he might say before changing the subject.

But instead he began to talk in long, complicated sentences without pauses, the way a man unravelling a strand of memory might speak into a tape recorder. He said he had grown up learning not to expect too much of life. He said he was just starting to realize how full of longing he was and that such yearnings were unseemly in a man of sixty. He said he had learned to shut out the noise, he lived more and more within himself. He said he still dreamed of himself as rooted in black soil, leafy and growing, and that in the dreams he felt an almost orgasmic sense of pleasure as his own chlorophyll manufactured green out of sunlight.

I came home from work one July evening to find a pickup parked in the drive and the curve of a plaid back rounded up over the plants in my garden. My first thought was that, without asking me, Tim had sent someone to do some work on the house and the man was helping himself to my vegetables.

Tim had left in May. Five years together only widened the initial distance between us until, like small boats caught in different currents, we all but disappeared from each other's sight over opposite horizons. He had an apartment a few blocks away, and as soon as I figured out what I was going to do, we would sell the house. In June he'd sent someone to repave the driveway without saying a word to me. When I phoned, he said it needed to be done to sell the house. "I got a deal," he said.

I trotted in my high heels over the soft grass toward the garden. My father stood up and brushed his hands off on his pants, then stepped gingerly around the peppers and tomatoes out onto the lawn. "Nobody home," he said, waving at the house. "I looked around for a key. Don't you keep a spare outside someplace?"

First I asked where Mother was and when he said, "Home," I asked, "Daddy, what are you doing here? What happened?" Instead of answering, he asked where Tim was. He knew Tim worked at home. And so we stood in the back yard, me in my suit and nylons and my heels sinking into the dirt and my dad a thousand miles from where he should have been, squinting into the sun at what he realized was me alone.

He glanced away as if embarrassed by the sight and scratched one ear with a flutter of fingers, cocking his head like a dog. "Hon," he said, "you didn't get your cuke hills just right. The vines are going to choke everything out. It's a good-looking plot, though."

"Daddy—" I began.

"I'll fix those up for you," he said and stuffed his hands into his pants pockets, swinging his face back to me again. "Got any chicken wire? Got any cold beer?"

I hadn't gotten around to telling them about Tim. When we got inside and I went around opening windows, Dad strolled through the downstairs rooms muttering, "Nice," and noting what was missing. He hadn't seen the house before—my mother didn't care for traveling—but he understood what his eyes took in. The empty spaces on bookshelves, a table lamp set on the floor since its table had gone, two nails in the dining room wall where Tim's Audubon prints had hung. I told him to help himself to a beer and open one for me while I changed. "Did you bring luggage?" I asked him. "I mean, do you want to unpack?"

"Later," he called from the kitchen. So I still didn't know anything.

We took the Stroh's outside and I got folding chairs out of the garage, trying to peek into the pickup's cab to see how much stuff was stowed in there. I couldn't see anything but a couple of Marlboro packs. "You want to tell me about it?" I said once we were settled.

My dad rubbed his chin with his free hand. "I don't know what to tell you, Chris," he said. I waited for a moment, and when he still hadn't said anything, I told him just to tell me what happened. "Was there one incident? A blowup?" I asked.

"I feel . . . foolish," he said. "I hardly know what happened. She got mad at me the other night when she got back from one of her meetings and found me asleep on the sofa instead of working on the house. She ranted and raved like she always does—you know, how I wasn't good for anything, how she was going to pack her bags, how she had to do everything with no help from me."

"Her standard routine," I said.

He grinned at me, but he looked embarrassed. "Well, I just laid there and listened to her, only the more she hollered—" He paused and stared off toward the garden. "—the smaller she got. I know that sounds nuts, but that's how it was. She got smaller and smaller and her voice got further away until she was just like a mouse squeaking. And I started laughing. I thought," he said, rubbing his hand up and down his thigh, "I might be going a little crazy. When I laughed, she charged out of the room and I heard her go into the bathroom and then the shower running. I just got up off of the sofa and threw some things in a bag and got in the truck. And here I am," he said. "What do you think?"

"I've got about a million questions, Daddy."

"Think I've gone off my rocker finally?"

"No," I said, "I don't. I'm surprised you didn't do it years ago."

"Well. . . ," he said.

"So when did this happen? Did you leave a note? Have you called her? Did you know when you left that you were coming here?"

The barrage of questions didn't ruffle him. Not much did. "This was—let's see—two days ago. Monday night. I didn't leave a note, but I called her yesterday when I stopped near Pittsburgh."

"Pittsburgh? It took you all Monday night and Tuesday to get there?"

"Well, I stopped a lot on the way. I'd pull into a truck stop or just one of those rest areas and think about things. I called and told her I was O.K., I just needed a vacation. I didn't say where I was."

"What did she say? Was she worried?"

"She said, 'Lou, this is just like you,' and I said, 'Margaret, this is anything *but* like me and you'd do well to ponder that.'"

"So you came here." Was he planning to stay?

"When I first got in the truck," he said, "I had no idea where I was going. But I thought of you before I even hit Selbyville, so maybe I knew all along. I thought about calling, but I figured maybe you'd just tell me to go home. I thought Tim might not like it," he admitted, "but I guess that's not a problem any more."

The beer was gone and the shadows were very long by the time I'd told him about Tim. He wanted to make sure there wasn't another woman involved and that I was doing all right. I said I'd make some dinner, but he said he wanted to take me out. "What do folks eat at restaurants our here?" he asked as we climbed into the pickup, and when I told him mostly Mexican, he was chagrined. He'd had his heart set on what he thought of as Midwestern fare—those tables heaped with pork chops and chicken, corn, salads, and pies he'd seen in *National Geographic.*

He didn't care for the burrito, but he liked the nachos and the margarita. "Tell you what I have in mind," he said when the coffee came. At a nearby table, all the waiters and waitresses were singing happy birthday to someone and serving up a cake with a sparkler stuck in it. "I was thinking maybe we could take a little drive."

"Tonight?" It was late and there was laundry I still had to do and there was getting up early for work the next day.

He leaned his chair back on two legs and laughed. "Not tonight," he said. "The weekend. Maybe you could take a day off?"

"Day off? What for?"

"Well, I thought we might drive out there," he said, and when I just went on staring at him, he went on. "*You* know—Illinois. Iowa. Have a look-see."

I couldn't believe it. It wasn't what I'd thought. This was no case of a daughter's suddenly finding herself the caretaker of a bereaved parent. My dad had come out here to see that soil.

I was driving and we were doing 70 along the cement-divided six-lane south of Hammond and Gary, trucks breathing down our tailpipe and the air greasy with a sulphurous stain. Dad had his elbow out the window and was staring at the dilapidated cottages and apartment complexes that pressed up against the highway as if they needed the thick fumes to stay upright. The look on his face was the same one I'd seen when he let me take the boat out by myself and I stayed too long. It was a sixteen-foot Chris Craft with a 50-horsepower Johnson engine on the back and it was fast. Sometimes I'd go out, speed around the bay for a while just to cool off, then nose into an inlet behind one of the small islands, drop the anchor, and lie on the top reading a book. Sometimes I'd fall asleep from the easy roll of the water and the sun, and then I'd have to open up the engine and race home. He'd be standing on the dock, one hand shading his eyes, watching for me, his face expressing a loss he had already felt though it hadn't happened. It was that same mixture of worry and hope. I knew he was imagining that the Midwest he'd seen in saturated-color photographs had disappeared and this smelly, crowded flat of noise had replaced it.

I flipped the radio to an AM country music station that broadcast out of downtown Chicago. I thought hearing country tunes might reassure him. "We'll be through this soon," I told him. He nodded and drummed his fingers on the door along with the music, a song neither of us recognized. Then he reached down to the floor for the road atlas, flipped to Illinois, and traced our progress. His face relaxed. His fingertip was poised right under the orange blob of Chicago, and west of us, the way we were headed, it was white straight into Iowa.

By the time we'd passed beneath the highway sign that said *80 IOWA* on it, he had started to whistle. There was nothing to either side of us but fields, flat and dusty and the crops still low enough that the straight planting lines and tractor tracks snapped by like something strobe-lit and made you dizzy. The air was heavy now with the sweet odor of alfalfa instead of industrial waste. We stopped at a Peru truck stop for lunch and in the parking lot Dad faced west and sniffed the breeze. Kitchen exhaust, I told him, making him laugh at his own ecstasy. "You're looking more and more like a saint undergoing a passion," I told him.

Before we rounded a hill and descended to cross the bridge over the Mississippi into Iowa, he had listened carefully to half a dozen radio farm reports as if he too had a few hundred acres in soybeans and was considering the weather seriously. "Could use some rain," he said, squinting up into a sky the color of a blue crayon. He was pleased by the breadth of the river and by the hills that moved under our wheels once we were across. "I had no idea it was this hilly," he kept saying. And then an ominous note: "I don't smell any fertilizer," he said, meaning manure. "I thought the air would be filled with it." The lack of this odor to my father was as disappointing as the absence of a familiar perfume on the body of a lover would have been to some other man.

We got a tourist cabin just outside Coralville and I drove us to the Amanas for dinner. Tim and I had gone there once with his parents the first time the two of us went home to present ourselves, unmarried and cohabiting, for their disapproval. When the waitress, a Norman Rockwell mom in gingham dress and full-length white bib apron, set out the bowls of cucumber salad and cottage cheese with buttermilk and scallions, dumplings in chicken gravy, stuffing, and mashed potatoes, I thought my dad would either cry or burst. He ordered pork chops and asked for a beer.

"We got Bud, Pabst, Michelob—" the waitress began, but my dad waved a finger at her and shook his head. "What's the local brew?" he asked. The waitress blinked at him, then at me. "Local?" she asked.

"Try a Special Export, Dad," I said.

"Oh," the waitress said, scribbling on her pad and nodding. I hoped she wouldn't mention that Special Export was now brewed by the same people who made Old Style and half a dozen other national brands.

She didn't and Dad said the beer was great. He rhapsodized over the pork and asked for more pickled beets and stuffing. It was a real church supper meal, just what he wanted. He somehow found room for a slab of homemade apple pie that took up most of a dinner plate and we ordered coffee. "You want local coffee?" the waitress teased, and when my dad asked her whether any grew in Iowa, joking along with her, she said, "Not since the Ice Age." Dad roared and asked whether she'd grown up on a farm. "Sure," she said. "And my kids too." She and her husband raised corn and hogs on their farm to the south, though her two sons did most of the work now. "Farming's tough," she told my dad, who was gratified to know this. He left a 25 percent tip.

In the cabin he snored softly. I could just hear the regular sounds through the wall. We were to be up at six and on the road soon after. He'd mapped our route out on the atlas, following the thin grey or red roads marked with orange dashes that indicated scenic routes. He had not mentioned my mother once all day.

Sunday we had eggs and sausages and biscuits with honey and headed south, stopping once at a stand set up in front of a white Queen Anne farmhouse straight out of Grant Wood to buy a quart of strawberries. Dad popped them into his mouth like M&Ms, eating even the little fringe of leaves at the top, and fed them to me as I drove. "You know why Tim hated having a garden?" I asked.

He stopped chewing and frowned. "He's from Iowa and didn't like to garden?" His mind was no more able to encompass these two ideas at once than mine had been.

"Because of these," I said, waving the tiny strawberry he'd just handed me at him. "Well," he said when I'd told him the story, "I guess making a pleasurable thing into a duty takes all the pleasure away, no matter what it is." He rolled a berry around between his fingers. His face had gone red. I knew better than to ask what he was thinking about besides Tim's father's strawberry patch.

■

We spent the whole day just driving and stopping so Dad could take it all in, store up the sights and odors and the soft air like grain in a silo to keep him through the winter. He just smiled, smiled at everything all day. At the giant sprayers like slender insects crawling over the fields, the silos and grain elevators, the velvety pastures cut by crooked paths of creeks that meandered through clumps of fat, healthy-looking cows. Every so often we'd get out of the truck and go sit in the quiet beneath an oak. We took our shoes off and waded into the Skunk River and both of us sank almost to our knees in slippery, sucking mud. Dad had filled a cooler with ice and diet cola and kept it between us on the seat. We'd sit and drink soda and gaze around at the green hills that resembled the sleeping backs of some big-eyed, slow-moving animals.

Dad asked a lot of questions. Since I had been to Iowa several times with Tim, a native, he figured I knew something. He would point to a field and ask what the crop was. Corn he recognized. I knew that just about everything else was alfalfa or soybeans, but I wasn't sure which was which. He wanted to know too about the winged ears of corn that had *Dekalb* printed across the cobs and were posted along fenceposts like shrines to the virgin along the roads in France.

Fed by idyllic photographs and the sensation of his own warm garden soil in his fingers, my dad had his head filled with meticulously groomed fantasies of Midwest farming in which there was no room for the unruly realities of anhydrous and cattle hormones and antibiotics. There was nowhere to put the facts of gigantic feed lots owned by the likes of ITT and managed by computers, or of corn seed kernels planted with insecticide already soaked into them. He kept shaking his head and asking why there wasn't any fertilizer smell, any manure, except around feed lots, where the stuff was just droppings. I didn't want to have to tell him that manure spreaders were as archaic as Conestoga wagons, or about the number of farmers who were severely burned every year by anhydrous, or about the cancer statistics or the chemicals that had replaced crop rotation and were leaving the black fields in which all his mythologies were rooted empty of earthworms and what he used to call "the good bacteria."

When I was in eighth grade, he and I had drawn a poster illustrating the Krebs cycle for a presentation I had to make in science class. I knew that as he looked at those fields, he was seeing the sun and the raindrops, the soybean plant with its nodules below the surface, the cow and its droppings and the little chemical formulas, just as we'd drawn them.

"Big farm supply company," I said about the winged corncobs. "It's common for the farmers out here to post signs by the road saying what their brand of seed is. Kind of folk advertising," I told him.

And then I drove frantically, looking for something to take his mind off any questions that would force me to reveal secrets he didn't want to know. We stopped by a grove of oaks and leaned on a fence to watch a dozen fat boars, pink as baby flesh, cooling themselves in a mud wallow and making deep, aggressive noises in our direction. The smell was unpleasant—the sour, burning smell of pig droppings in hot air. My dad breathed it in deeply. He actually said, after gazing at the animals for a few minutes, "It's like a painting, isn't it, by that man who painted all those plump, rosy women."

"Renoir?" Was he serious?

"That's the one," he said, eyeing the pigs with serene bliss just oozing over his face. This was the Iowa he had come to see. "Isn't it just like that?"

"Do you know, Dad," I said, in place of saying, *That's nuts*, "it's not uncommon for a boar to reach 700 pounds." I had picked up an awful lot of agricultural tidbits from the pages of the Chicago and Detroit newspapers. Dad shook his head. He said, "Lands!", not being one for swearing, and then said we had to look for a place where the dirt was real soft so he could stick his arm in up to the shoulder and see, after all these years, whether it was true.

In the cabin that night, we sat on the front porch that was a small replica of farmhouse porches we'd seen all day. We had had another Amana dinner—Dad suggested it sheepishly, asking, "Would you mind?" He wanted to try the local beef. He hadn't realized, before our drive, how many cattle were raised in Iowa. "I thought that was all Nebraska," he told me, "and that Iowa was just pork. Sounds silly now, saying that."

The menu promised *Iowa corn-fed beef* and Dad ate his steak with gusto, happy at the idea that he was eating what he had seen that same day, instead of something wrapped in plastic at the supermarket hundreds of miles away. I tried not to think about the hormones in the meat. I had chicken. Dad asked whether I'd read that the East Coast chicken farmer who had become famous for unusually yellow and fresh-looking chicken parts had revealed that the yellow color came from marigold petals. "He fed the chickens flowers not long before the end," my dad said, drawing a finger across his throat. I told him that hogs and cattle were "finished" the same way. I told him that hogs were finished not just on corn but on things like peaches and Jerusalem artichokes. We both liked the idea of peach-finished ham.

As we rocked on the porch, drinking coffee out of styrofoam cups and watching the sun set, Dad said, "Do you think I ought to call your mother?"

"I think you should do whatever feels right," I said.

He snickered. "You're a lot of help," he said, "you and all the rest of that generation of yours. 'If it feels good, it's O.K.' Wasn't that the slogan?"

"Close enough," I said, "but that had more to do with drugs and sex than with calling your wife. And it was a long time ago."

He sipped at his coffee. "I was always glad," he said, "that you kept your head on straight during those times. I used to worry when you'd come home with your hippie hair and your dungarees and beads. I'd ask myself whether I shouldn't find out—you know—what was going on, whether it was just the protest thing you were doing, or . . . the other. The drugs."

"How come you never asked?"

"Well," he sighed, stretching his legs out, "partly I guess I didn't want to know, and partly I figured you had common sense and wouldn't go all haywire on us."

JIM ELLEDGE

FOR FRANK O'HARA'S GHOST

It's heaven alone in the almost-
dark with you, the Urals on the opposite
side north and east of the
Bosphorus (which out of season's
no place for us) simply knolls
passion fogs over like breath across
medicine chest doors,

                    but above
your name and mine, cursive across
steamed glass, stars! stars random,
prettier than calendars',

                    and below,
more easterly and south, an archipelago
messes around in the fancy
blue June Taylor Dancers style:

clockwise smack-dab into the sun
you and I've come how lucky
night never ends nor day not even
love clean good love lots of it blonder
bluer-eyed even than the movies'

"I'd have said something, you know, but I didn't know you were worried."

"Ever smoke pot?" he asked, staring into his coffee.

"Sure," I said.

He nodded. "LSD?"

"No."

"I told her that."

"Mother?"

"We used to talk about it, she worried a lot—you know how she is. She's always reading things and making generalizations from them. She talked about it a lot, worrying."

"She assumed the worst is what you mean, and criticized."

"Chris, now," he said, "it's just her way. It's very hard for your mother to say she's worried or scared or whatever. It comes out angry instead. That's easier for her." I didn't say anything. Everything he said was true, but I wanted to protect him right now and not make excuses for her. "You have to understand," he said after a moment.

"Go call," I told him. "You want to, so go do it."

He eased up slowly out of his chair and rummaged in his pocket for his wallet. "Never used this credit card thing until Pittsburgh," he told me. "I'll be right back."

By the time he was finished on the phone in the office it was dark and I'd gone inside. The screen door squealed and I glanced up from the magazine I was reading. He stood there with his hands on his hips and an embarrassed grin underneath the brim of a green cap with the Dekalb winged corn stitched onto the front. "You like it?" he asked before I could say anything. He pulled at the brim and tugged the hat down snug on his head. "Fellow visiting the guy who runs the cabins was in the office and I offered to buy it from him. He works for the county agent, though, and he just took it off and gave it to me—wouldn't take any money. It's brand new," he said happily. "You like it?"

My dad didn't often wear hats. When he did, they were utilitarian, like the ones with earflaps and chin straps he had worn to work in the yard when I was small. "It's great," I said brightly. It didn't look like him any more than "hippie hair" would have.

"Do I look like a farmer?"

"You need a little shit on your boots," I said before I thought. His face reddened. "Excuse me," I said, "a little doo-doo on your boots." He laughed. "Did you get Mom?"

"Yeah," he said, going to the refrigerator and lifting a beer out. "I'll be taking off Tuesday morning from Michigan, bright and early."

"How was she?"

"Ready for me to come home," he said.

His new cap on his head, Dad drove as we headed east Monday morning. I asked him whether he wanted to make a detour up into Chicago and see the lake. Or we could see it in Michigan. He frowned and glanced at his watch. "We've got time," I told him.

"Well," he said, "what do you want to do? You want to see it?"

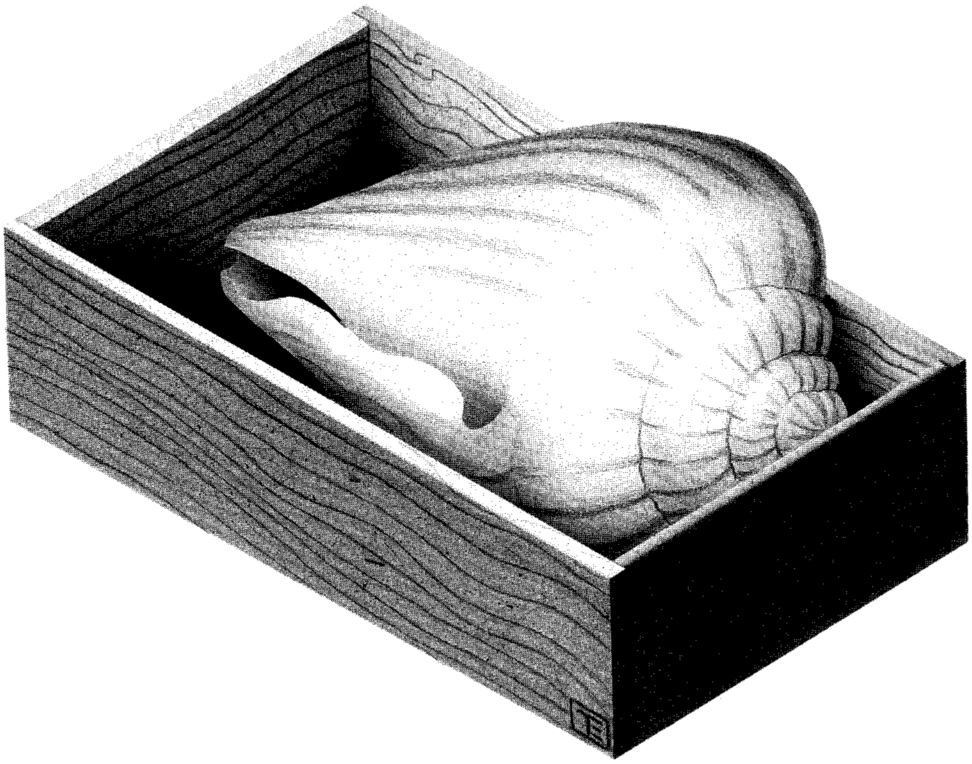
"I've seen it," I said.

"Let's skip it, then," he said. He had his ocean to see, he said, and then he started talking about home as we moved back into the congestion of factories and refineries and six-lanes. He had his crab traps to see to and he was worried about his clam bed. On the phone, my mother had told him she'd heard a rumor that the Coast Guard would be issuing one of the warnings that came along every few years about bacteria in the shellfish. These weren't my dad's "good bacteria." They came from waste that had drifted from the coastal shelf, where it had been dumped. They infected the clams and crabs and mussels and made them unsafe to eat for a whole season. He was going to go see about it just as soon as he got home.

He drove east and kept his eyes straight ahead, and when the first raindrops came pelting down, hitting the windshield like nickels, he hardly noticed. He just rolled up his window, turned on the wipers, and went on talking, telling me about a family of ospreys who had built a big, complicated nest atop one of the channel markers in the bay, and how he'd spun the boat close to it once, and what a sight it had been to see one of the huge birds alight from the sky, its vast wings hovering over the reeds of its home, a silver fish clasped in its claws. ☐

Nancy Roberts

THE UPSTAIRS PEOPLE



Sara watched them work in the garden. The woman was laying down bricks to make a narrow walkway that split the garden in half. Her name was Schilly. She was young, with braids coiled on top of her head like a nest. Sara admired the rise and fall of her straight back, the graceful bend of her knees, the way her long neck arched with the strain of lifting. The man with her was John, possibly her husband, possibly not. He wore jeans that were torn at the knees. He wheeled bricks to her in a wheelbarrow from a heap of them stacked like a fortress near the porch. They'd lived upstairs for almost a month. She knew this because sometimes she heard them shouting at each other, but she'd met them only yesterday.

Finally they noticed her and came over to where she sat in her wheelchair. The cat, who favored Sara—and Tom Mallory when he was around—was curled in the grass next to her, a sudden absence; his blackness sucked the color into the space that was himself.

Sara twisted around, letting a lock of her long dark hair linger on her cheek. She liked the feel of it there. She wrestled a jar out of the pocket behind her and held it up to the woman called Schilly. "This," she said. Inside the jar a praying mantis splayed itself against the sides, testing the glass with its enormous saw-like legs.

The woman took it from her and loosened the cap. "Poor thing, it'll die with no air." The little curls escaping her braids were golden in the sunlight. She said, "What do you think of our walkway?"

John glanced at the wheelchair and the too-narrow walkway, rubbed his chest with the flat of his hand in the way of some men when they are embarrassed, and shook his head at the woman.

"It's lovely," Sara said quickly and smiled. That was her strong point, they always told her, putting people at ease with her handicap. She waited for the relief in their faces, then said, "But they're coming inside."

Schilly smiled. "The mantises? We ought to worship them instead of the other way around. They are little gods serving our garden for awhile."

"What she means is, they eat aphids," John said. "We bought the eggs and put them here."

"I see." Sara pushed the lock of hair behind her ear. "But they don't stay in the garden. This one was on the table where I work on my shells."

"Shells?" Schilly clapped her hands. "What do you do with them?"

Sara didn't know how to explain, so she said, "What sort of work do you do?"

"We work in the city," the man said. "But we like to leave it behind."

"We love shells, too, don't we, John?" Schilly said. Then she stooped, pulled the cap off the jar and placed the jar on the ground. The brown-green creature swiveled its Martian head from side to side, as if it was listening for something, rubbed its front legs together, and crept out slowly. The cat crouched, its shoulder-blades jutting upward, and moved toward the insect. The man pushed the cat aside with his foot.

Sara wheeled herself into the bathroom and swung over the toilet seat, lowered herself with arms that bulged like a man's, and sat there for a long time. There was no hurry, after all. Except that the cat was mewling for food, except that she should begin on the shells.

The system was simple enough: a little box for each shell, with a label on the bottom facing upward, fitting with the other boxes into a large shallow wooden tray. She had a chart to follow, instructions, and a book with photographs of shells and their names. But the labels got mixed up, the shells kept falling out of their little boxes, or the boxes slid around, never enough of them done at one time to fill a tray completely.

The trays were for Tom Mallory's souvenir store, to give people something to remember the town by. A useful occupation, they'd explained at the convalescent home when they moved her now that she was ready to live on her own. She missed the special high school classes where she always got the best grades, the friendship of the others, the dimming memory of her parents, dead for two years now. She missed even the regulations and routines. It was better perhaps to be chafing for independence than to be pronounced ready for it and managing so poorly. Even so, she knew she would never go back. If only she could get organized and not always be interrupted by a mantis or a sudden daydream. If only she did not feel as dark and invisible as the cat in the shadow next to her bed.

Tom Mallory would be coming with more shells, expecting to find a finished tray or two. He had gray-green eyes. Sunburned lines radiated out beside them like perfect grooves on a scallop shell. His hair was black, streaked with gray, bleached rust on the ends. He carried a cane, but didn't seem to use it much, except to lean on when he talked. Sara couldn't tell how old he was. His eyes were young, but his words were old. The last time he came to see her he said, "The others finish on time," and then as if to soften his words, he added, "Maybe the work's too simple for you. Maybe you ought to go to college. There's money for that, you know."

He'd placed a sack of shells on her work table. "These are the nicest I could find." Then his eyes moved toward the sofa as if he wanted to stay for awhile. "Why won't you talk to me?" he said. "I think you're pretty. I think you're a cut above."

Sometimes she wanted to ask him to stay so she could breathe in the smell of the ocean he brought in with him. And she liked his eyes. But when he talked about her, she felt confused. So she touched the bag of shells and said, "I'll try."

"You're going to come out of this," he said. "All of us do, one way or another."

They came downstairs to her apartment. Sara pulled aside the dark curtain, slid open the glass doors that opened to the yard, and wheeled outside.

"Come to the beach with us," Schilly said. "We collect shells too."

John looked at the wheelchair, back at Schilly, shook his head as if baffled by the juxtaposition of woman and machine. "We've gone over this," Schilly said to him.

Sara hesitated, wondering if she should go. She decided to relieve their awkwardness, a thing habitual with her. "No problem with this thing. It folds up. If you could just lift me down to the sand, I'd love it."

She rested on the sand like a seal, the upper part strong, nearly upright, the rest tapered, limp. With her powerful arms, she could move a few inches at a time, but mostly she wanted to stay where she was. She felt the grainy warmth of the sand; she sniffed the smell of seashells; she listened to the waves. John had lifted her there, and the two had gone off.

Shimmering lines of heat stretched in the distance like vibrating wires hung over the sand. The seagrass grew in snatches where the sand curved into the dunes. Rust-colored fences leaned into the dunes unevenly as if something enormous had come out of the sea and stepped on them. The waves curved toward the sand; the froth scalloped the shore like lace edging. She watched, fascinated, as the foam curled closer then retreated, sucking holes behind pebbles and bits of shell, leaving the sand sunken into dark wave-shaped curves where before it had been pale. As it moved closer, the water sounded like a big man breathing through his teeth.

When the first bit of foam touched her foot, she waited. The darkness underneath the waves held her, and she did not want to move away. The next wave covered her ankles. She closed her eyes and wondered what it would be like if she were to surrender to the oncoming tide and allow herself to be carried, swept. She had always disciplined her thoughts with a certain ramrod stiffness, determined to uphold, resist. Now she felt strangely tired: yielding, soft, willing to be taken. She listened to the heavy breath of the foam; a pebble rocked against her hand; the water was cold on her fingers, her wrist, her elbow. She opened her eyes and saw that her legs were covered with water.

They ran to her, swinging net bags filled with shells. Each took an elbow and dragged her away from the oncoming tide, but already her jeans were soaked and she was cold.

"We had no idea the tide would move in so fast! You're all right? Let's get you warm."

John frowned at Schilly. "I told you we should check the paper."

Sara smiled at them. "It's all right. I liked it."

They wrapped her in a towel, and when they returned to the house, they took her upstairs. Schilly undressed her. Sara began to protest, but the mood of the beach was still on her. John lowered her into a warm bath. Sara was embarrassed, but the warm water felt wonderful on her arms, her back, her belly. Schilly held her so she wouldn't slide under, and Sara felt sleepy. When she woke up, she was lying between them on a large bed. Shells were everywhere in the room. They spilled out of the bags onto the floor, littered the dresser, the windowsills. Schilly dressed her and gave her dinner. When she left, John gave her a net bag filled with shells.

The cat greeted her with smug meows. A headless mantis crawled on the kitchen floor. Sara held up the net bag and shook it lightly so that bits of sand scattered on the table. She lifted out a small whelk and traced its outline with her fingertips. She rubbed the smooth sides against her cheek and smiled. She thought maybe she would show it to Tom.

The next time, John placed her high on the shoreline and told her the tide was ebbing so she needn't be afraid. She found fragments of shells buried in the sand, swept her arms in a wide arc around herself to see if there were any whole ones. She discovered that she could move more efficiently by pressing her forearms into the sand and wedging her elbows. She edged closer to the water where the shells were whole, pried them out of the dark heavy sand where the waves had deposited them. When the shells came up broken, she gathered up the polished fragments of clam shells, bright purple in the wetness like uncut amethysts, and the translucent white pebbles that lay on the sand like perfect moons. Seagulls and terns fluttered around her, crying like kittens, and the sand collected everywhere, in her pockets, her hair, her shoes.

Later, she took the new shells out of the bag and scattered them on her worktable. She cared, suddenly, about the names. "Moonshell," she said, and traced the perfect concentric whorls, held it up to the light to see the faint patterns of pale gold and gray. "Boatshell." She set the little shell rocking in her palm, then prodded under the tiny shelf with her tongue, tasting the salt.

She fixed dinner for Schilly and John, apologizing for her slowness. "I can't use the back burners," she explained. They hadn't asked what had happened to her so that she couldn't walk, as if it didn't matter at all. Later they admired the shells spilling out of the bag on the worktable, told her she ought to arrange them, make things.

"What sort of work do you do?" Sara asked them.

Schilly ran her hand beneath her hair, released now from the braids, and lifted it from her neck like a handful of thick foam. "We don't like to think about the city just now. Just the ocean."

"And the garden," said John.

"The garden." Schilly crossed her legs beneath the flowered print robe she liked to wear in the evenings and kicked her foot rhythmically against the cloth so that the flowers jerked and bobbed nervously. "The eternal gift of gardens. The greening of the darkness." She threw back her head and her neck arched out of its nest of foam.

John folded his arms and stared at the bobbing flowers, shook his head and frowned. "What she means," he said, "is that we haven't always been happy."

Sara looked from one to the other. "I'm glad you made the garden," she said.

"Of course you are," Schilly said, and sat upright, dropping her bare foot to the floor. "You're the real gardener. You dig us, ha ha. You make us grow."

"What she means," John said, "is that we like you."

"No, John, that isn't it exactly." Schilly reached over to Sara and touched her hand. "What I mean is, you can heal us. Keep coming to the beach with us. Come every day."

As measured by the advent of the beach—Sara's time—Tom Mallory came to see her in the third week. She invited him in, holding back the dark curtain as he slid open the glass doors, lowered her head in the old way preparatory to confessing another failure, teasing him, then spun around in her chair and lifted a completed tray up to him, smiling triumphantly.

"Where did you get these?" He took the tray from her. "These aren't the shells I gave you."

"With my friends. Does it matter?"

"Who?"

"Schilly and John. They live upstairs."

He stood straighter, pushing up from his cane. "I've seen them."

"Yes."

"I could've taken you to the beach."

"It was their idea. They're nice to me."

"Maybe." He put the tray back on the table and left without taking it.

Even so, Sara could not stop. When she wasn't at the beach, she worked on the trays until she had filled all the empty ones. The work went quickly, for she knew the names for all the shells now. Then she began to arrange the leftover shells on shelves, windowsills, in the bathroom. One day she might put them in groups, the scallops on one shelf, the oysters on another, the boatshells on yet another, graduated by size. Or she mixed them, scattering the tiniest translucent clamshells around the larger moonshells, or the warty-rough oysters with the smooth large clams. She filled jars with pebbles, purple chips, bits of beach glass shot through with sand. Sometimes she had to brush aside the carcass of a praying mantis to make room, but they didn't bother her much now. Perhaps, finally, they were starting to go away. The cat slept on her bed, crosshatching the bright yellow bedspread with black hairs.

One evening when they had returned from the beach and finished the spinach salad picked from the garden, Sara said, "The bath. I liked it."

"Yes, of course," Schilly said. "Yes." When John lowered her into the warm water, Sara looked away, embarrassed, but she didn't mind when Schilly stayed and held her up, squeezed spongefuls of water on her back, rubbed soft lather, smooth as a bride's dress, on her skin. After awhile, John came back in. He wore a white terrycloth bathrobe and watched them.

"You are so good for us," Schilly said, smiling at John. Her hair lifted away from the braids in little curls from the steam.

The mantises stopped coming inside, and the cat was strangely subdued, a dark shadow against the corner of the bedroom. Sara was glad when Schilly came down to fetch her for the beach or to say, "You must try these carrots," or "Come sit with us and watch the sunset." One day they didn't come for her and the waiting was long, but at sunset Schilly came to her and said, "Come out to the garden. We have a surprise for you."

Sara put down a jar of stones and wheeled herself into the yard. John stood next to the wheelbarrow. He was wearing the jeans with the holes in the knees and rubbed his chest with the flat of his hand. Sara finally had to ask, "What am I supposed to be seeing?"

"The walkway, dummy. John did it for you." Schilly gestured to the brick path that was now wide enough for the wheelchair. John looked away, but Sara wheeled up to him, leaned forward, clasped her arms around his waist, buried her face in the smells there. Then she wheeled back and forth on the walkway, feeling the little irregularities in the bricks. She smiled at the tall beanstalks, the elephant-shaped squash plants, the tomato plants entwined around tall green bamboo sticks. The smells had reminded her of coffee and cinnamon.

After the bath, John stroked her hair, traced her chin with his fingers, put them into her mouth. She flicked her tongue around the moon-curves of his fingernails, tasting the salt.

Tom Mallory came to the upstairs porch the next morning. John lifted the wheelchair down to him; then he lifted Sara. The two men looked at each other. Their eyes locked and they didn't speak. John turned and went into the house. Tom Mallory shook his head and moved ahead of Sara to the glass doors, not using his cane at all. Before he slid them open he turned to her and smiled with his whole face so that the lines cut deep around them. "It's good to see you again. I've missed you." The cat rubbed itself against his ankles.

"You could have come sooner," she said, realizing suddenly that it had been a long time.

"I did, but you weren't home." He moved into the apartment ahead of her, then paused, taking in the strangeness of the room. His eyes swept over the clusters of shells, the jars filled with stones and chips and glass, the seaweed draped from a lamp. "It's beautiful," he said. "I wish I'd known."

Sara said nothing.

"Something's been let loose in you."

She shrugged, avoided his eyes.

"They'll be gone come fall," he said.

She began to turn away from him.

"Whatever it is that's happening to you, it's special. You're special."

"What do you know about summer people, Mr. Mallory?"

He stared at her for a few moments, then said. "I wish you would call me Tom."

"Why?" She spun her chair so she was facing him.

"This isn't the time to explain. But please don't let them hurt you." He left, again without taking any trays. The cat followed him, and Sara watched it from the open door, a blot of darkness against the brilliant green and yellow of the yard. She waited awhile, then wheeled out into the yard to wait for them.

*

"I hope you don't worry about money," said Schilly. "We can help."

"That's one thing I'll never have to worry about," said Sara. "I get a check every month. Not much. But I don't need your help. I don't need anyone's."

Schilly knelt in front of her and covered her hand with hers. "We've taken so much from you. We need you. It's what love is for, being allowed to help."

"Schilly," John said.

She ignored him. "We'd like you to move in with us."

"Schilly, don't," John said.

"We could build a ramp up to the back porch. We could arrange the furniture better so you can get around more, don't you think, John?"

John turned from them and walked up the brick walkway between the tall rows of plants. Sara followed him. "Don't worry," she said, "I don't expect things."

The next morning she asked him why the mantises had disappeared. "Cycled out," he said. "They proliferate, they mate, the females scatter to lay their eggs. Most of the males, of course, are long since eaten. And now it's all winding down, getting ready to lay low for the winter."

"Winter?" It was out of her like a sigh.

"I'd hibernate, too, if I could." John smiled at her.

"The eternal presentness of life," Schilly said, and gathered up her braids around her head. "Ready for the beach? Go get a sweater."

Sara wanted, just once, to say no. But always now there was the bath afterwards, the bits of sand left in the bottom of the tub, Schilly's hair curling in the steam, the warm bed afterwards. Sometimes when they touched her something made her draw outwards from the inside, acid sharp like vinegar, a feeling almost like the sudden daydreams. Schilly and John touched each other sometimes. Once Schilly said, "This is making us new."

The next time, Tom Mallory came by so early that his knocks at the door roused them. Sara wheeled out to the porch alone wearing the white bathrobe. Her dark hair was tangled around her face.

His gray-green eyes looked worried, sad. "You know you're a smart girl," he said. "And very nice."

She began to turn her chair away from him, back to the door, but he threw down his cane, stepped up to the porch and laid his hand on one of the handles. "They're going to leave come winter," he said. "It's me you need."

"I don't need anyone," she said.

There were too many tomatoes. Every day the three of them sucked on the ones that had ripened on the vine, the juices and seed spurting out, dribbling on their chins, forming pink puddles on their plates. "Why don't you can them?" Sara said.

"No time left," said Schilly.

John shook his head at Schilly. "Let's go inside. It's late."

The porch railings were lined with tomatoes that would keep for a long time because they had been picked hard and green. John and Schilly hadn't said anything more about building the ramp.

Sara saw a V of geese. The edges of it were serrated like the legs of a mantis, shimmering against the humming sound of the sun. The shadows from the sand fences were deeper, nearly purple, and the waves at dusk thickened and shone like mercury, calling up the new obliqueness of the light. That night they sat outside wearing sweaters, except Schilly, who wore a green woolen shawl over her flowered print robe. They watched the moon spin out a double halo that trembled at the edges because of the cold. The cat leaped out of the darkness onto Sara's lap and made her gasp.

"We are going tomorrow," said Schilly.

"We live in the city," said John. His face was hidden in the darkness.

"You'll be back come spring?"

There was a silence and then Schilly said. "We never know about our summers." They were silent some more. Then Schilly said, "You can have the tomatoes, and the squash. It'll be coming in for at least a month yet, don't you think, John?"

"You said you'd build me a ramp," Sara said, pressing her hands against the arms of the wheelchair as if she might lift herself up.

"Eternal presentness," said Schilly. "Cycles." She stood over John and pressed his head against the front of her shawl. "Don't you see? You've healed us. Even the garden wouldn't have been enough. We were losing each other—until you." She ran to the front of the wheelchair, crouched in front of Sara, took both her hands in her own.

Sara pulled her hands away. "I hate cycles." She spun her chair around, wheeled to the glass doors, and went inside. She did not answer when they knocked.

He came to see her every day. His gray-green eyes followed her. He leaned on his cane and hovered. He said he would take her to the beach any time she wanted to go, helped her sweep out the dead mantises and brush the cat hairs off the bedspread, picked the squash, moved the rest of the tomatoes off the railing of the porch. But still she would not look at him or speak more than the barest civilities. The upstairs people had been gone for two weeks.

"They didn't love you," he said finally when he found her again in front of the garden, staring at the brown curling remains of the beanstalks.

She pressed her shoulder blades into the back of the chair and said nothing.

"They used you."

"It doesn't matter."

"I wouldn't do that." He stood in front of her, the heels of his hands pushing him tall against the curve of the cane. "I would stay." His face, when he was serious was almost smooth. The cat rubbed itself against his legs, purring loudly.

"Then why did they make this for me?" She pointed to the brick walkway.

"I'd like you to share my life," he said.

"For God's sake, why?" Even to herself she sounded peevish. The cat leaped onto her lap, a darkness there. She stroked it absently, noting the softness of its fur.

"You could live right on the beach. You could make beautiful things, much nicer than trays. You could go to college."

"I don't need any help."

He shook his head, stood without moving.

"Take some tomatoes," she said abruptly, impatiently. "I hate tomatoes." She wheeled quickly down the path, so that the cat jumped off her lap. Tom followed her inside into the kitchen. She found the net bag, filled it with ripening tomatoes, thrust it at him. "Here, take them."

He took the bag and pivoted away from her on his cane.

"Come back and help yourself to the squash. There's far too much for me. Tom?"

He returned after the first frost. All the tomatoes had ripened and the squash was not yet damaged. He came in through the glass door carrying the net bag. He gestured to the sofa with his cane. "May I sit down?"

When she didn't answer, he sat, quickly, as if that made him surer.

She was sitting at the worktable, arranging shells on a piece of flat driftwood. She tilted up her chin and flicked a lock of hair behind her ear. "You think it was just sex, don't you."

"I think it was wrong. I think you deserve better." The cat jumped onto the sofa next to him and sat there, its legs tucked under so that it was shaped like a shoebox. Tom scratched it near the tail, so that its rump raised up in reflex.

"It wasn't wrong."

"They cared about you the way they cared about the mantis eggs and the garden and their shells. It was a good season. You were another project. Now they've taken it and gone."

"I liked it."

"It wasn't something you could keep. I can give you a whole life."

"I already have a whole life. I wish you'd stop being helpful. I can't stand it. You sound so old."

"Sometimes I feel old, but I'm really not. Maybe I need someone to help me remember that. And maybe I love you. How can I help you see that?"

Sara felt the strange peace of the first time at the beach. But she did not want it to be the same. There had to be a way of meeting it, actively, this time. She sat for a while in silence, breathing in the smell of the ocean he'd brought in with him. She pulled a lock of her hair forward and held it against her cheek. Then she wheeled up to him so that her knees touched his. She put her fingers on the little lines next to his eyes, traced them slowly outward into the silver streaks in his hair.

"This is my home," she said. "I work here. I accept visitors."

He began to turn his head away, his ocean-green eyes sad. She turned him back, her fingers on his chin. "And I invite them." She took the cane out of his hands and let it drop to the floor. □

THE PART-TIMER

Carol Howell

A sign on the wall of the Writing Lab read:

students
please be sure
that
Someone knows you're here

If the capital *S* in *Someone* were intentional, Peter thought, the whole thing could be an existential joke, although the existentialists he knew didn't have much sense of humor. They were too mad at the universe for not meaning anything. The *S* was probably a mistake. Only you weren't supposed to say "mistake" anymore, nor even "error," which sounded more genteel. This year the word was "symptom." That turned Peter and the other tutors into lay-practitioners.

"Classic symptoms of dependent and independent clause confusion, Mr. Okigbo," he would say with a professional frown, squinting at the grubby page as though he couldn't quite make it out without his headlamp.

Mr. Okigbo would look grave. "What must be done?" he would ask in the tone of a patient prepared to face the worst.

"We must operate at once!" Peter would want to declare, but instead he would give the student a page of exercises to do while he filled out his "chart."

The medical theme was June Armstrong's idea. She ran the Writing Lab this year. In the past five years, there had been five directors. Next fall June would come up for tenure: an imaginative Lab program might impress the Committee.

Not that Peter blamed her. Coming up for tenure these days was like applying for a job with the Spanish Inquisition: before you could join, you had to survive the interview. You'd better have done enough (but just enough) of the right kind of thing, because you only got one chance to cross into Canaan. If tenure was denied, you had to leave the university within a year. Then you were washed up. What other university would have you? Most people left the academic life altogether. A few swallowed their pride and became part-timers, like Peter.

Peter had not yet been denied tenure, however, because he hadn't allowed things to get that far. He was an A.B.D., which traditionally stood for All But Dissertation but had lately come to mean (depending on his mood) Absurd By Definition or Ambition Be Damned. He had completed all his coursework, passed all his exams, submitted his dissertation proposal, received permission to go ahead, and then done nothing about it. Or not absolutely nothing: two elaborately footnoted chapters on Thomas Love Peacock were fermenting in the bottom drawer of Peter's gray steel desk.

He was supposed to be working on them between students. In fact, he had taken this job in the first place because it gave him time to work on his dissertation. It was a night job, a service offered to students attending the Evening School of the university. Peter planned to spend his days researching and writing new material and his evenings at the Lab rewriting and editing. He had plenty of time to do this, for it was one of the job's two saving graces that his desk was next to the telephone. Whoever sat nearest the phone booked the appointments. To himself and his friend Tony, Peter assigned students whom he judged, from the lackadaisical sound of their voices, unlikely to show up. All the students who sounded like royal pains in the ass he assigned to Leona Banks. She sat across from him, a stout deep-voiced woman with bushy hair and tinted glasses. Since Leona was a particular friend of June Armstrong, Peter had her pegged as a company spy. When she was watching, he was more careful about how many phoney appointments he booked for himself. Phoney appointments were his greatest relief. He would make up a name and write it in the schedule book. When the time came, he would wait the mandatory ten minutes, then announce cheerily "Stiffed again!" and retire to the Burger Joy in the basement where he could drink his coffee in peace.

The second saving grace was the Poetry Clinic, which June Armstrong had introduced and which Peter, by virtue of his record as a published poet—two sonnets and a haiku had appeared in small journals—was permitted to conduct. Every Tuesday at seven o'clock, students could bring their poems to the small conference room at the back of the Lab for a little tinkering and body work, no appointment necessary. Peter enjoyed these sessions because they gave him a foretaste of what life would be like when he finally propelled himself out of this stagnant little cove and back into the academic mainstream.

Ten years ago, when self-expression, rather than career-planning, was regarded as the principal campus virtue, the conference room would have been packed. Now a good turn-out was six or seven people, half of whom were regulars. There was Mrs. Squires, for instance, who had gone back to college after all her children had graduated and settled down to their own lives and she'd realized that old age with her husband was going to be a gigantic bore. There was also an ex-priest studying for a degree in psychology and a couple of spiky-haired day-students who always wore huge black overcoats, bought second-hand, and wrote what they called anti-poetry depicting human beings as robots, insects, and lunatics.

Occasionally there were new faces. There was one tonight, Peter saw, as he came in late with his Burger Joy coffee and a stack of pale blue contest announcements. The students had already dragged their chairs into a circle and passed around photocopies of the poems they had brought. Peter said hello and looked inquiringly at the new man.

He could have been forty or fifty or sixty, a lean man with grizzled hair clipped so close you could see the bony contours of his skull. His sharp nose and cheekbones jutted from a ruddy gleaming face; his clothing, all dark green, stretched tightly across his chest and bagged about his legs as though he were built like an upside-down triangle. On his hands, which seemed stiff and bent, he wore black cotton gloves.

"They tell me it is O.K. to join this group," he said with a distinctly foreign accent.

"We're glad to have you," Peter said, then introduced himself and the other students.

The man bowed his bony head in acknowledgement. "As for me," he said, "I have had to take many names."

The ex-priest leaned forward. "A refugee?" he asked sympathetically.

The stranger nodded, moisture shining in his eyes. "Ever since my youth."

"But what is your real name?" Peter asked. This was a question very near his heart, for he, too, lived under an alias.

There was a tiny delicate pause. "You could not pronounce it," the man said with a slight smile. "I always take a name indigenous to the country I am visiting. Here I call myself McCoy."

"Just McCoy?"

Now he grinned at all of them. "A good American name, yes? It amuses me."

Peter thought it would be impolite to press for more information. Instead, he took advantage of the pause to pass around the pale blue announcements and make a speech about the annual Huntingdon Pierce Poetry Awards. The winner would be offered a year-long fellowship as poet-in-residence at Huntingdon Pierce, one of the top prep schools in the country. There, amid the green Virginia hills, he would write poetry, talk poetry, and be gazed at by well-bred young boys who wondered what poets looked like. At the end of that year, his work would be published by Huntingdon Pierce Press, and he would move on. Many doors would be opened to a former Huntingdon Pierce Fellow.

"I hope you will all consider entering this contest," Peter said in a teacherly voice, knowing none of them would. They had no ambition for their poems. "Including you, sir," he added graciously, looking at McCoy.

"Thank you," said the newcomer. "I like contests very much."

Everyone stared at him in fascination. There was something about the gleaming angles of his face, the black stillness of his eyes. Peter forced himself to look away. He sipped some coffee, glanced through the pile of poems on his lap, clicked his ballpoint pen ready for action. Tuesday was his night to be professional; he had to remember that or he would lose track of his dream, his plan, the self he had been becoming for years. "All right," he said briskly, clicking his pen. "Who wants to go first?"

Shyly, Mrs. Squires lifted her hand. After twenty years of raising five children, Peter knew, she loved to be first in anything. Her poem began: "The flower of Love comes not with Spring,/Yet it lives in the coldest heart./ It's ready to leap upon you/And its feelings to impart," and continued in this manner for five more stanzas. Peter let the students comment first. The ex-priest said it was refreshing to see an optimistic poem. This was kindness on his part: all of Mrs. Squires' poems were optimistic. One of the day-students said the poem was only viable if you believed in the viability of love. The other one pointed out the uneven meter. Mrs. Squires nodded as she always did, making notes, but Peter knew they would never see another version of this poem. Next week she'd have a new one, much the same; the comments would be the same, and again she would nod and take notes. The new student, McCoy, said nothing, only turning his still gaze from one face to another.

When it was Peter's turn to speak (such expectant faces they turned toward him; what gave them the right to expect so much?) he hesitated too long, and the group became uneasy. He was struggling, the usual struggle between wanting to tell the truth and not wanting to hurt her feelings. Should he say the trouble was not with the poem so much as the way she saw (or rather *didn't* see) the world? That the clichés of the poem disguised an anguished passivity which she had yet to discover? The very black eyes of McCoy across the circle made him uncomfortable. This man expected something of him too.

"I think the problem with this poem lies in the central metaphor," he said at last. "Characterizing love as a flower is rather limiting. A flower doesn't run or leap, and it—that is to say, love itself—has no feelings. And there's the wrong kind of ambiguity suggested in the last line: 'It finds you when it may.' How do you mean 'may'? When it is permitted to? When it feels like it? When destiny decrees? Are you implying something about human self-will?"

Mrs. Squires' pen scratched furiously. Her neat gray head bobbed up and down as she agreed continuously with his criticism.

"I think perhaps the rhetorical message of the poem—be content and wait for love—might become more convincing if you found a more appropriate metaphorical structure," he concluded, knowing that none of the implications had sunk in. No one ever saw the flaws of their own lives reflected in the flaws of their poetry.

The ex-priest, as usual, had brought in a love poem. Once in a while he wrote some religious lyric addressing God directly, but Peter suspected he considered his religious poems too passionate to share with the group. If his poems about God were more personal than those about his wife, Peter thought, he was more of a priest still than he knew. The other students liked the love poems, perhaps because the idea of a man's forsaking the terrifying vow of celibacy for love of mortal woman was generally reassuring. The poem began: "I am alone tonight,/ And I feel old wounds starting to bleed."

Peter stiffened at the imagery. But the rest of the poem turned out to be the usual thing: the speaker found solace in thinking of the woman who would soon come home, her arms full of grocery bags. When it was Peter's turn to comment, he said only that he liked the first two lines, then added: "It is almost always unnecessary to say 'I am in love' in a poem."

The "almost" was a gift. He liked the ex-priest. He became angry, however, with the two day-students, who had also brought in the usual thing.

"Is there any reason for mixing upper and lower-case letters this way?" he demanded. "Or for breaking up the lines like this? Why so many hyphens and slashes? Why the asterisks and per cent signs? They don't make any sense."

"*Life* doesn't make any sense," one of the day-students pointed out.

"So you want to give us a taste of chaos?" Peter shook his head. "It's not enough. Sensation alone is never enough. It is up to the artist to *transcend* chaos and meaninglessness, to create a context in which it is possible to imagine their opposite, so that we will know what we have lost." Then, seeing that they did not understand, he went on irritably, "Anyway, you've got to master the conventions before you can break them. What you ought to do is write some villanelles, some sestinas—write some simple sonnets, for God's sake! Anything in strict form, anything with rules. And—" he finished lamely, aware too late that he shouldn't have lost his temper, "you ought to read more, too."

Mrs. Squires and the ex-priest were scribbling away; the day-students kept their eyes averted. Only McCoy returned his gaze, and Peter, looking into those unflickering black eyes, felt his anger drain out of him.

"Mr. McCoy," he said. "Do you have a poem for us?"

McCoy inclined his head, then plucked a folded sheet of paper from his breast pocket with his clumsy gloved fingers. He held the sheet up and read aloud, in a low flat voice, a poem about a classroom on an overcast winter afternoon. A poster depicting Cain and Abel hung on the classroom wall. The teacher, a badly-dressed old man, "withered and dried-up," held a book in his hand and thundered in a hollow voice. The choir of children sang back its lesson: "One thousand times one hundred is one hundred thousand,/One thousand times one thousand is one million." The last stanza of the poem repeated the first, as if to make the reader experience first-hand the dreary monotomy of the lesson.

Peter was spellbound. "Read it again," he commanded between numb lips. McCoy read the poem again. Then Peter reached over, extracted the sheet from the gloved hand, and read it himself. "This is a poem," he said, chilled.

McCoy nodded. "I have been a poet many years, though I go unrecognized."

Peter turned to the group. "There is not one unnecessary word," he said. "He has scraped away the layers and exposed something about all of us. The great things, the immense things—represented by the reference to Cain and Abel and the unthinkable numbers chanted by the children—these are obscured by the trivia and tedium of everyday life. And isn't this what really happens to us? Don't we somehow lose sight of the great things?"

The other students murmured appreciation as the poem was passed around the circle. Only the ex-priest didn't like it. Who was the old man? What was the book? There was something disturbing about the poem, he said apologetically, something almost subversive.

"Poetry ought to be subversive," Peter declared, avoiding the eyes of the two day-students.

And McCoy nodded, smiling broadly, his mouth full of broken yellow teeth.

Peter's real name was Olympus P. Perlow. That had been the inspiration of his mother, who added the P for rhythm. Her own name was Ellen, her husband's Joe; she thought (as if language were a form of magic) that giving her son an extraordinary name meant that he would become an extraordinary man. Ellen, who had never ceased to regret that she had abandoned what might have been a brilliant career in the theater when she married Peter's father, read nursery rhymes to her son as though they were incantations. She made him feel the pathos of Old Mother Hubbard and the horror of the Three Blind Mice with passionate readings far more compelling than the effusive cheer of his kindergarten teacher.

By second grade, however, he was sick of both nursery rhymes and his terrible name. Teachers smiled when they read it off the roster on the first day of school, and the other kids called him Limpy. By the end of third grade, he had fought all the boys he knew, a lot of boys he didn't know, and some of the girls as well. He usually lost, but he fought back and didn't cry, and by the ethos of the third grade, this earned him the right to a new name. He began calling himself "Pete" because there were two other Petes in his class and he figured it was a safe choice. Besides, "Pete Perlow" had a kind of muscular appeal. It sounded like a baseball player's name. Eventually, everyone forgot that he had ever been called anything else, except for his mother who, not realizing that he was practicing the same magic she had taught him, felt betrayed. From third grade on, he revealed his true name only to the IRS and to girls he wanted to fall in love with.

The most recent girl was Annie. For four years they had lived together while Peter went to graduate school and Annie worked part-time as a Kelly Girl. Then, six months ago, she had been offered a full-time job at IBM. This development empowered her to cut her hair, buy some new clothes, and find her own apartment. The day she left, Peter stayed up late, drinking and waiting for the formal feeling after great sorrow that Emily Dickinson had promised, but it never came. Perhaps the sorrow had not been great enough, he thought, contemplating the ranks of empty beer bottles lined up on the floor. Annie had said he should feel free to call, but there was no point in small talk and he did not want to discuss why she had left. There were things she would not mean or even know until she heard herself say them. Saying them would make them real and kill all possibility of hope.

Instead of talking he tried to write, to conjure Annie in poetry. He thought about her green eyes and crooked teeth and long feet. He remembered the way she said "What" in her sleep and quarreled with her step-father and ate tofu dipped in barbecue sauce and ran her hands through her hair till it looked like a fuzzy dandelion. He could make lists of such articles. But put together, lined up like beer bottles, they failed to articulate just what he had lost. He knew that the whole was supposed to be greater than the sum of its parts, but he could not resolve his impressions: he was all beads and no string.

This was a new grief, because he had grown up listening to poetry, reading verse and nonsense rhymes as soon as he could puzzle out the letters, spending his birthday money each year on books like Child's ballads. One day, during geography class in seventh grade, it suddenly occurred to him that he could write his own. He promptly wrote in his yellow tablet a poem about the ocean, which he had never seen. It began: "Ocean! O Ocean!" Thereafter, he wrote a poem each day during geography class. When the tablet was full, he began another, entitling it *Volume II*. Sometimes at night in his room he would go through the tablets and give dramatic readings in whispers before his mirror. At no time had he experienced any difficulty in writing: inspiration and execution had always been one smooth movement.

But now the urge to write poetry came and passed just as swiftly. He watched himself light up with brief inspiration, then almost at once go dim. The change had begun late in college, around the time he started to worry seriously about a career. Still, even as late as graduate school, he had had enough confidence to formulate the Plan.

As he outlined it to Annie one joyous night when they were celebrating his passing his Orals, the Plan was this: he would take a temporary job, teaching part-time or tutoring in the Writing Lab, while he finished his dissertation. Then he would get a position as an instructor on the faculty of some college or smallish university. He would work hard, teaching and writing critical papers. Now and then he would publish a poem in one of the better quarterlies. Publishing would put him in line for tenure and promotion. Eventually his poems would be collected in a volume or two. The best ones might be included in anthologies. He had no delusions of grandeur, he told Annie. He knew he would never be a great poet, but if he could just write a few decent poems, he would call that success and be content to earn his living as an academic.

It was such a modest Plan, especially when put forth in a reasonable tone of voice by someone who had just passed his Orals "with distinction," that they lifted their glasses and drank to It with confidence. What had gone wrong? What had diverted him from this honorable stream and set him adrift, like Frankenstein's misunderstood monster, on a floating piece of ice in the middle of nowhere? When Peter tried to figure it out, his mind offered him only images, metaphors which suggested other metaphors, or bits of poetry he had once memorized. He couldn't think anymore. He wasn't sure whether he had ever been able to think, whether he had ever done more than string metaphors together and quote poetry by heart. Why was he unable to produce more than two chapters on Thomas Love Peacock? Why should the elegant and witty Thomas call forth such turgid over-footnoted prose? Why could he write nothing at all about Annie? Her departure had silenced him altogether.

All that was left to him was reading. He kept a crate beside his mattress filled with new books, feeling uneasy if his stock ran low. He read at home, at school, on the bus, and standing in the aisles of bookstores. After Annie left, he read in bed all day until it was time to go to work. He tutored from six till eleven; then, if no one were available to go drinking, he brought beer and a sandwich home and stayed up the rest of the night, reading. It was both the most and the least he could do, and after a few months, his face began to take on the same putty color as the Writing Lab walls.

After the clinic was over, Peter felt his blood thaw and the sensation return to his lips and fingertips. He sprawled at his desk, waiting for his nine o'clock appointment, restlessly sketching eyes on his blotter: suspicious eyes, flirtatious eyes, eyes widened with pure and fearless purpose. He tried to draw McCoy's eyes: windows of the soul with the shades pulled down.

He rose, making a show of checking the appointment book. It was 9:05. Tutors were supposed to wait ten minutes for a late client, but Peter knew this one wasn't going to show. He could tell by the lackluster way she'd sounded on the phone: the appointment was probably her teacher's idea. He glanced at Tony to see if he might want to go for coffee, but Tony was deep in conference with a student. Across the aisle, Leona Banks was explaining subject-verb agreement to a Mr. Myoshi. Today she was wearing a t-shirt that said: *I Haven't Come All That Far And Don't Call Me Baby.*

"No, you would not say 'The figures adds up,'" she was telling Mr. Myoshi. "'Figures' is plural."

"Ha! Then why you not say 'figures *are* plural'?" Mr. Myoshi demanded triumphantly.

Peter grinned. He had scheduled that appointment especially for Leona. He could feel her eyes sending poisoned little darts into the back of his neck as he left the Lab. She was probably keeping a written record of his comings and goings.

He went downstairs to Burger Joy, where he felt at home. Here, in a contoured plastic booth, he could drink a large coffee with extra cream, read some Conrad Aiken or Delmore Schwartz, and look at girls. Actually, there was a particular girl. She was one of those in brown nylon uniforms who stood on the other side of the counter, waiting to serve. While the others slouched wearily, their faces shiny with grease, this one stood erect, at ease, as if she knew how to wait. She was tall and serene, grave while she took an order, engrossed while she filled it, and quietly radiant as she counted out the change. She had long dark hair, very black eyebrows, and pink cheeks. Her plastic pin said she was Julia.

At first Peter hated her. He told himself she was probably the kind of girl who walked around inhaling her own perfection like perfume. He especially hated the small gauzy scarf she took to wearing with her uniform—a plaid of warm pinks threaded with gold which set off her dark hair and heightened the color of her cheeks. He devised a series of tests to make her reveal her true nature: knocking his coffee over, insisting he'd ordered a small when she brought the large, asking for his change in pennies. But nothing disturbed her sweet equilibrium.

Then one day while he was sitting in his booth working on his contempt, he realized what made it hurt so to look at her. She was a living embodiment of something he thought was gone from the world, something he had found only in art. His hatred, he saw, was a form of self-protection: what if she were the real thing, as good inside as she appeared outside, "a mind at peace with all below"? To gaze upon this and not possess it would be the cruelest pain of all. Once he saw this, he saw that she was indeed the real thing, she was what she seemed, and his contempt evaporated. He was humbled. Even the pain subsided and he was content just to watch her. It was enough to know that perfection could exist in the flesh and not just in the minds of poets.

Tonight Burger Joy was almost empty. All the students were in class. He spotted Julia down at the end of the counter, but just as he approached, the manager tapped her shoulder and led her away. Peter stopped dead and strained to see where she had gone.

"Can I *help* you?" said one of the other girls. Reluctantly he turned to face her. She was large and gray and ordinary. He would have to tell her what he wanted.

"Large coffee, please. Extra cream."

He wanted to ask when Julia would be coming back, but he didn't want this girl to smile at him the way girls always did when you asked them about other girls. Then, in the back where the burgers were frying, he caught a glimpse of Julia talking to the manager, peeling a flimsy black net from her hair. He craned his neck as she moved around a corner. She was reaching up, gracefully lifting something from the wall—her coat! He would get to see her in her coat.

"Forty-five," said the gray girl. She was smiling that smile. He fumbled in his pocket for change. When he looked up, Julia had gone. He had missed her in her coat.

He took his coffee over to a Crayola-red booth. Julia's coat would be long and slim, not one of those swollen down-filled life preservers all the girls were wearing. It would be taupe or mauve, something restful to the eyes. She would hold her hair up with one hand while she adjusted the collar, then release it to spill down her back.

He took out a pen and held it poised over a clean white napkin. He wanted to write a poem for Julia, something reverent, passionate, simple, and good enough to take first place in the Huntingdon Pierce competition. He would write an ode to Julia's coat. To her coat? Why not? It sounded right, it sounded natural. It also sounded familiar. And suddenly, to his horror, there sprang to mind some lines of Robert Herrick's about a woman of the exact same name: "Whenas in silks my Julia goes/Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows/That liquefaction of her clothes." Peter slumped down in the booth. That was that. There was no possible improvement on "liquefaction" or "Then, then, methinks." He wrote Herrick's lines on the napkin and stared at them. What now? Tape them to her cash register? He crumpled the napkin and used it to wipe off the table. Impossible to imagine starting all over again with a stranger. Explaining your eccentric habits, your fetishes and fears. Telling childhood traumas again, inventing all those stories anew. Recounting past glories, describing ambitions, justifying failures. The thought of it was exhausting.

Suddenly the Burger Joy flooded with students. The 9:30 class had just let out. They had ten minutes before the next one began. Despite the rush, they organized themselves into tidy lines in front of the counter. They were disciplined, older, a different breed from day-students: secretaries, bank tellers, insurance adjustors, assistant supervisors, working for the college degree which would mean more money, responsibility, self-esteem. They were people with payments to make: mortgages, child support, Sears accounts; people so weighted down with obligations they had no choice but to move upward, the whole load balanced precariously on their shoulders. Between classes they ran out to put money in the parking meters and thought about what to pack in the kids' lunches. The men loosened their ties; the women limped a little in their high heels. "Been a long day," they said to one another as they waited in line. By 9:45 the place was empty again and Peter was late for his next appointment, but that didn't matter because it was one he had made up.

When he got back to the Lab, Leona Banks fixed him with a glittering eye. "Your mother called," she said loudly. All the tutors stared.

"My mother?" said Peter.

"Long distance."

He frowned. "Must be an emergency."

"No doubt," said Leona. He could see the malice gleaming behind her tinted lenses. He glanced around the room and the tutors quickly dropped their eyes.

"Well, I guess I'd better go return that call," said Peter. "From the pay phone, I mean. So I don't tie up the line."

As he left he heard Leona reply, "How thoughtful."

"Do you know your phone's out of order?" his mother demanded. She had answered in the middle of the first ring. "We've been trying to reach you for days!"

"What's wrong?"

"That's what I'd like to know! Where have you been?"

"Working, mostly."

"What kind of school makes you work the graveyard shift?"

"It's night-school, Mom."

"So who goes to night-school? Owls? Bats? What are you teaching, vampires?"

"Working people, Mom. They have jobs during the day and they go to school at night."

"What kind of life is that?"

"A hard one, but they need the education."

"I mean for you, what kind of life for you? You still think you're an undergraduate, nineteen years old? A mattress on the floor, cold soup from a can?"

Peter winced. The cold soup had been five years ago. His mother never forgot a detail and did her bullying, like Socrates, with questions.

"What are you waiting for?" she was saying. "You changed your name to Peter, you think you're Peter Pan?"

Peter tucked the receiver under his arm while he jingled the change in his pocket. When he heard his father's voice he picked it up again.

"The doctor says we have to give the new medication time," his father was saying.

"I think you need a new doctor."

"Farb is supposed to be the best hormone man in—"

"Not a hormone man, a head man. Change of life isn't supposed to last fifteen years."

"Shows how much you know. Your mother's been going through change of life since you were born."

"But where'd she get that accent? All of a sudden she's a greenhorn, fresh off the boat. What role is she playing now? Listen, Dad, don't let her call me at work anymore."

"Me? I haven't let or not let for thirty years. When you were born, she became chairman of the board of a brand-new corporation. Me, I'm just a stockholder."

"I know, Dad. I'm sorry."

"It has its advantages. Listen, Pete, I put a check in the mail."

"I wish you wouldn't, Dad."

"What's the difference whether you spend it now or when I'm dead? You need it now. Pay your phone bill. Buy a boxsprings, or better yet, a can of Sterno to heat the soup so your mother can stop talking about it. Later on when you're rich and famous, you can put a check in the mail to *me*."

When Peter got back to the Lab, his ten o'clock appointment was waiting by his desk. The tutors looked up and quickly back down again. Leona had probably been grilling them about him.

"Everything all right at home?" she inquired.

"Under control," he assured her. He caught Tony's eye and tipped an imaginery bottle to his mouth. Tony nodded and held up a finger. That meant: okay, but just one. More cheerful, now that there was something to look forward to, Peter gave Leona Banks a tender smile, sat down at his desk, and turned briskly to his ten o'clock. "Now then, Mr. Ubayabhanu," he said. "What seems to be the trouble?

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Peter's favorite bar was a dim little place near the campus. It was too dirty and undignified to be patronized by faculty members (except for a few tenured alcoholics, for whom it was perfect), and undergraduates ignored it because there was no music. That left only the graduate student body and people on the fringe, like Peter and Tony, who gladly suffered dimness and dirt for the sake of cheap prices.

"How's Peg?" Peter began, pouring out the first glassfuls. To Tony, one beer meant one pitcher.

"Beats me." Tony rubbed his face through his beard, then drained half his beer. "I see her for about half an hour in the morning, but she's busy feeding Gina and throwing up."

"Morning sickness still?"

Tony nodded. "With Gina, she had it the whole nine months. I get back from Holy Name around four, shower, change, eat, and then leave for school just when Gina's waking up from her nap. When I get home at night, Peg's in bed already, exhausted. So am I. I don't know how she got pregnant again in the first place."

"When's she due?"

"Late April."

"The cruellest month."

"No shit. You don't know the half of it. Holy Name is talking about cutbacks. According to seniority, of course. That leaves me and the gym teacher, and she's the bishop's niece. I don't know how we'll manage if I get canned, Pete. Gina's still sleeping in the laundry basket." He wiped foam from his moustache. "I've got to find a decent job."

"Anything in the works?"

"Nothing. Nobody wants a modern novel specialist. It's not even a specialty anymore—it's a hobby, vacation reading. If only I'd done something obscure, like folklore of divorced Amazonian Indians. Or something really unpopular, like medieval Welsh."

"You still wouldn't get a job. Medievalists never retire."

"They die."

"Only some."

"I should have gone to Rutgers and studied rhetoric. By now I'd be tenured and on sabbatical in Spain. I never wanted to believe those stories about how there weren't any jobs unless you were the bishop's niece. I studied what I loved. Was that so wrong? And now look: all day long I teach sentence-diagramming to seventh-grade girls who couldn't care less, and all night I proofread term papers for Arabs studying business administration. And I'm lucky to have that much." He poured them each another glass. "Sometimes I envy you, Pete. Nobody gives a damn how late you get in, least of all you. If I was on my own, I could get by with a part-time job too. I might even write something." He sighed and finished the last of the beer. "It must be great to be alone."

"Hell yes," said Peter. "Now that I finally got rid of Annie."

"Christ!" Tony clapped his hand to his head. "What a jerk. I forgot."

"It's okay. I forget myself sometimes."

"What I meant was, even though I envy you and even though it's a pain in the ass having to worry about someone else's welfare, without Peg or Gina I don't know who I'd be anymore. They define me. You understand what I'm saying?"

"Sure," said Peter, holding up the pitcher for a refill. "I read all about it in a modern novel."

Tony and Peg lived on the top floor of a five-story building without an elevator. By the time Peter and Tony had crashed up all five flights, reciting all the stanzas they could remember of Kipling's "If," the lights had come on in the apartment and Peg stood in the doorway hissing, "Sh! Quiet! Don't you know what time it is?"

Tony kissed her cheek and stumbled into the apartment, Peter following reluctantly. He was not used to seeing Peg so massive. He still pictured her as she'd been when they were all undergraduates, sitting cross-legged in skinny jeans, her frizzy hair all fly-away, rolling joint after joint of fragrant Colombian. Now she had on a terrycloth robe splattered with baby-food stains and hiked up too short in front by her beachball stomach. Her hair had been clipped into a short square cut, like a helmet.

"How's the baby?" said Peter. "Gina, I mean."

"Asleep, I hope." She folded her arms above her belly. "Honest to God, Peter, you know how hard he works. You should know better than to keep him out so late."

"I'm a big boy, Peg," Tony said groggily. He pulled off one boot and let it drop on the floor.

"We can't all sleep till noon," Peg went on.

"Leave Pete alone," said Tony. "I made him come up to say hello and you chew him out. How many friends have we got, anyway? I'm going to bed." He dropped the other boot, clapped Peter on the shoulder, and plodded down the dark hall toward the bedroom.

Peg watched him go. "Would you like some coffee or something?" she said, and Peter understood that this was an apology.

"No, no, I'm fine."

"Well." She cocked her head toward the bedroom, listening. "You'll have to come for a real visit soon. Bring Annie with you."

"Sure thing. You go on to bed now."

"Just pull the door shut," she said, her voice floating back from the darkness of the hall. "Good night."

"Good night," said Peter. The door closed behind him with an embarrassingly loud click.

It was too late for a bus. He started walking, thinking of Peg and Tony in their double bed. Peg curled on her side, Tony pressed against her back, his arm curving over the globe of her stomach. Little Gina in her laundry basket. He thought about the sound of three people breathing in the darkness.

Annie always slept on her belly with one leg outside the covers. She couldn't sleep unless one leg were free. On winter nights like this she slept in fuzzy socks and a sweatshirt. She had always complained about the cold in Peter's apartment. She probably kept her new place very warm and slept in the nude. He thought about Annie sleeping in the nude.

It was nearly three o'clock. Too late to call anybody. But every time he passed a pay phone he thought about it. He would decide not to; then, as soon as he saw the next pay phone ahead, he would debate the question all over again. Could he wake her up long enough to ask if he could come over and sleep beside her? Just sleep. How would *you* feel, he asked himself sternly, if your former lover woke you up in the middle of the night asking to come over and sleep beside you? But the answer didn't help any. Grateful, he thought, I'd feel grateful.

At the next pay phone, he called. It rang five times. Then, when she answered, he hung up. He regretted it at once, but he was out of dimes.

The cold made the night motionless. The stars and moon were very white against the blue-black sky. It was a crescent moon, shaped like a grin. "The moon was a white grin," he said tentatively. But what would come next? He waited, but nothing followed. He wanted to express solitude, insignificance, the indifference of the universe, but the impulse died in him, unspoken. Besides, Stephen Crane had already said it. Conrad Aiken had said it better. Delmore Schwartz. Wallace Stevens. T.S. Eliot. Christ, T.S. Eliot. He suddenly recalled McCoy's gleaming angular face reading the lesson of the children's choir: one thousand times one hundred is one hundred thousand, one thousand times one thousand is one million. Like the impersonal stars.

The cold had worked its way through his coat. He hugged the two ends around him (the buttons were off again) and tucked his hands in the sleeves, kimono-style. Thus enclosed, he walked on under the grinning moon in his own chilled embrace, reciting poem after poem aloud, burning poetry like fuel to get himself home.

On the following Tuesday, there was a sheet of paper lying on Peter's desk when he got to school. It was a poem, neatly typed, untitled, unsigned, lying exactly in the center of the desk as though it had been placed there with great care.

"Who left this here?" he asked, but none of the tutors knew. Peter glanced over the page, oddly chilled. It had to be one of McCoy's. He must have brought it in early to give Peter time to prepare his remarks. He knew how good he was. But why did he bother with the clinic at all? Was he so hungry for an audience? Those lean cheeks, that still black gaze—he was hungry for something. Peter folded the poem and put it in his bottom drawer on top of Thomas Love Peacock. He needed some coffee before taking it on.

Tony came in and stopped to say hello. When it appeared that both of them had been stiffed by their first appointments (no great surprise to Peter), they strolled downstairs to Burger Joy. Peter insisted on standing in Julia's line even though it was longest. He watched Tony's face to see his reaction to her sweetness and grace, but Tony only ordered his coffee and went on talking about his resumé. When it was Peter's turn, he had only to smile and Julia promptly produced a large coffee with extra cream. He glanced over his shoulder to see if Tony was impressed, but Tony was busy blowing on his coffee and hadn't seen. "Can I help you?" Julia was saying already to the next person in line. Peter thought she sounded slightly wistful. Reluctantly, he followed Tony back upstairs.

Just before seven, sitting alone in the circle of chairs, he unfolded the poem and read it. "The first thing I forgot was your voice," it began. The speaker was addressing a woman who had vanished—died, it seemed—and who was now vanishing from his memory, although his longing for her remained intact. After her voice he forgot her footstep, her smile, the color of her clothes and size of her shoes. Peter's scalp prickled and his forehead grew damp. The poem was about details, parts, broken pieces, which was all Peter had left of Annie—all, he thought suddenly, that he had left of anything. He was a part-timer in every sense of the word. It was as though this poem had been written about him. Or by him. Something cold dripped down the side of his face. All the speaker had left of the woman was her name, seven letters of her. Then he forgot even that and had only the letters, which moved about, unconnected, forming advertisements in street-cars and shaping other names on envelopes, "all in pieces now," dismantled, rising toward the heavens in abstract alphabetical glory.

Peter looked up blindly from the page to find that the students had arrived, that they were all seated around him. Or not all. McCoy was not there and no one had seen him.

"I spoke to him after class last time," Mrs. Squires volunteered. "Did you know he speaks thirteen languages? Or maybe it's fourteen. I think he must have escaped from the Communists. I asked him if he wears those gloves because he has arthritis and he said no, but he fell into a fire once and his hands were badly burned."

Peter nodded dully. The students read their poems. Afterward, Peter could not remember hearing them, although some mechanism in his brain produced plausible, if brief, responses. "I don't think 'soft-eyed as a wombat' strikes the right tone," he told one student. To the ex-priest he merely repeated: "'Fruity passion lapping waves'?" Still McCoy did not come. Everyone's poem had been discussed and the students were making the rustling sounds which meant it was time to go, when Peter said, "Wait. There's something else I want you to hear."

He read the poem once, slowly, then again, realizing that he had already begun to memorize it. Whole blocks of words lifted easily from his tongue. When he finished, there was silence as he passed the poem around the circle. Then one of the students said, "Wow."

"I'm not sure I understand what it's about," said another.

"It's about despair," said the ex-priest. "Guilt."

"The death of love," said someone else.

"The death of everything," said the ex-priest.

"What *was* her name?" asked Mrs. Squires.

To his amazement, Peter heard himself answer: "Annette." He counted the letters quickly, as did everyone else. Seven. But what had made him say it?

"I think you should put her name in the poem."

"No, he says he's forgotten her name. That's the point."

"But he hasn't really forgotten. It's like 'My Last Duchess.' We're supposed to know things about the narrator he doesn't know about himself."

"It's a very sad poem," said Mrs. Squires.

"Worse than sad," said the ex-priest, shaking his head.

"You should send it to that contest. I bet it would win."

"Oh yes," said several others.

"Oh no," said Peter.

After class Mrs. Squires stopped his heart by saying, "You read so well! You should have been an actor."

All that week he was sick with shame and worry. What had possessed him? How was he going to explain it when McCoy showed up next Tuesday expecting to discuss his poem? Could he call it a prank? His students would lose all respect for him, they would not listen, they would stop coming. June Armstrong would want to know why. Leona Banks would tell her.

All week long the shame lay undigested in his belly. After three nights of drinking alone, he enticed Tony out for another beer. They came home stewed again when the bars closed, and this time Peg was so angry she refused to speak to either of them. Peter was too drunk to walk home and spent the night on their couch. He woke, hung over, to the sound of pots being slammed around in the kitchen and slunk out of the apartment without saying goodbye. By Tuesday he could not eat. He considered calling in sick, but that would mean prolonging the misery for yet another week. So, feeling gaunt and angular himself, he waited in the circle of empty chairs for his doom. Again McCoy did not show up.

The next day Peter went to the registrar's office. Nine McCoys were enrolled in the university. The only one over the age of twenty-five was a woman. He called every McCoy in the phone book and checked with New Listings. Nothing. McCoy the student, whoever he was, had vanished. But why had he come in the first place?

The weeks went by. The students in the Tuesday night clinic stopped mentioning McCoy. March thawed messily into April and Peter began walking home at night, following the flooded gutters, smelling a river tang like a taste of hope in the gurgling sewer grates. Soon it would be spring, and spring would ripen hastily into a gritty summer of hot steel and cement whose burnt-out end would cool into autumn and finally freeze. Then it would be winter again and he would be walking home after the bars closed, enveloped in his own frosty breath. It could go on that way indefinitely, year after year, the university renewing his part-time contract each September, while he aged and thinned and grew curly around the edges like a worn scrap of paper.

And so, one particularly brilliant and heartless April day, he dug past Thomas Love Peacock for the pale blue page. He read it again to make sure he understood what to do. Then he re-typed the poem carefully, making some changes, taking a long time over each one. He felt a touch of the old thrill, as though he were twelve years old again writing "Ocean! O Ocean!" in geography class. When he finished, he took the poem into the Men's Room and read

■

it in whispers before the mirror. In the clammy greenish light, his face seemed to glow. It was a better poem now. He had made it better. Whatever gift he had once possessed had not utterly deserted him.

Perhaps this was the reason McCoy had crossed his path. Perhaps the world was not without the guidance of a compassionate deity after all. The thought of McCoy as a divine agent made him laugh aloud, a sharp joyous laugh that rang off the lavatory walls. "Someone knows *I'm* here!" he cried. A student just pushing open the door stopped and hastily withdrew again.

Peter titled the poem "Annette," enclosed a cover sheet on departmental stationery with the necessary information, signed it with his true name, sealed it in a departmental envelope, and solemnly dropped it into the mail chute. Now his fate was out of his hands. Afterward, he wandered outside to the Quadrangle, where students were lounging in the late afternoon sun, drinking Cokes from Burger Joy. In an hour or so the evening students would arrive, carrying umbrellas, blinking in the sunlight. Peter suddenly felt a great wave of love for them all. For studentkind. After all, who was he without them? They defined him. The urge to write poetry stirred again in his mind, muttering phrases. He envisioned the green hills of Virginia, the serene neo-classical buildings, the noisy games of young boys. What had been languishing inside him these ten years would suddenly come into flower: *The Virginia Poems.*

Occasionally, during the next few weeks, he was seized by fits of panic. Feeling like Raskolnikov, he began to write letters in his mind, all beginning: "After painful consideration, I have decided to withdraw my entry from this year's competition." Each time he imagined signing the letter, addressing the envelope, and dropping it into the mail chute, he felt calm again, almost drowsy. He could think clearly about the good he might do if he won. He could save his money and help other struggling poets, perhaps even one day endow a fellowship of his own. That could be his new Plan. Given enough time and a little luck, he could make everything up to everybody. Maybe that was the very reason the chance had been sent his way. This last notion made him thoughtful. He returned all of his Thomas Love Peacock books to the library, paid the fines, and checked out a collection of theological essays, which he added to the pile of books beside his bed. After this, the fits of panic stopped.

When Tony's son Jason was born at the end of the month, Peter went to the hospital with a bouquet of irises and a funny limerick he had composed about the baby. Peg forgave him completely and even spoke to Tony about naming Peter as the baby's godfather.

In the middle of May, when the trees were still hazy green and spring term had just begun, the letter came. It too was pale blue, addressed to Mr. O.P. Perlow. Peter tucked it in his pocket while he went to the Men's Room to wash his hands. Then he sat on Tony's desk for a while, joking around. Leona Banks sent him annoyed glances. When a student with no appointment walked in, Tony volunteered to take him. Peter got up and strolled out to the hall. Leaning against the water fountain, he took out the envelope and carefully slit one end open. No white page fluttered to the ground. They had not returned his poem. Instead, there was a letter on pale blue stationery embossed with the Huntingdon Pierce seal. Peter felt his heart start up again with a thud.

But the letter did not say he had won. It did not say Honorable Mention or even Nice Try. It said he was being disqualified for plagiarism. The poem he called "Annette" was, despite the facile attempt to disguise it, actually a poem called "The Dead," written by the Spanish poet Pedro Salinas, who had died in 1951. The letter said that fortunately a member of the Awards Committee who had studied in Spain on a Fulbright had recognized the poem. It said that Mr. Perlow had violated academic ethics, artistic integrity, and common decency. It said that after painful consideration, the committee had decided that such violations must be made an example of to the academic community, and therefore a copy of this letter was being forwarded to the chairperson of his department.

Peter began to walk down the empty hall. His footsteps were too loud. Students sitting in class glanced up, startled, as he passed. He trailed bits of lessons after himself like streamers: "Now Keynesian theory, on the other hand, advocates certain monetary and fiscal programs by government to increase employment. . . ." "Octapeptides, as the diagram indicates, consist of eight amino acids linked in a polypeptide chain. . . ." "In modern times, a nonce word is one an author invents for a particular usage or meaning. Joyce, for instance. . . ."

Polypeptide, Peter repeated silently, *nonce.* He liked the sound of those words. He thought about the sound of his name, his true name. Soon everyone would know it. June Armstrong, Leona Banks, everyone. Even Tony would be ashamed and would not want him for his son's godfather. What had possessed him to use it, that grand ridiculous name he could never live up to?

He found some stairs and wandered down them. They emptied him into the basement. Burger Joy was deserted. He peered along the counter, but Julia wasn't there. Another girl occupied her station.

"Can I help you?" she said wearily as Peter approached.

"Where's Julia?"

"She doesn't work here anymore. She was fired."

"What? Are you sure?"

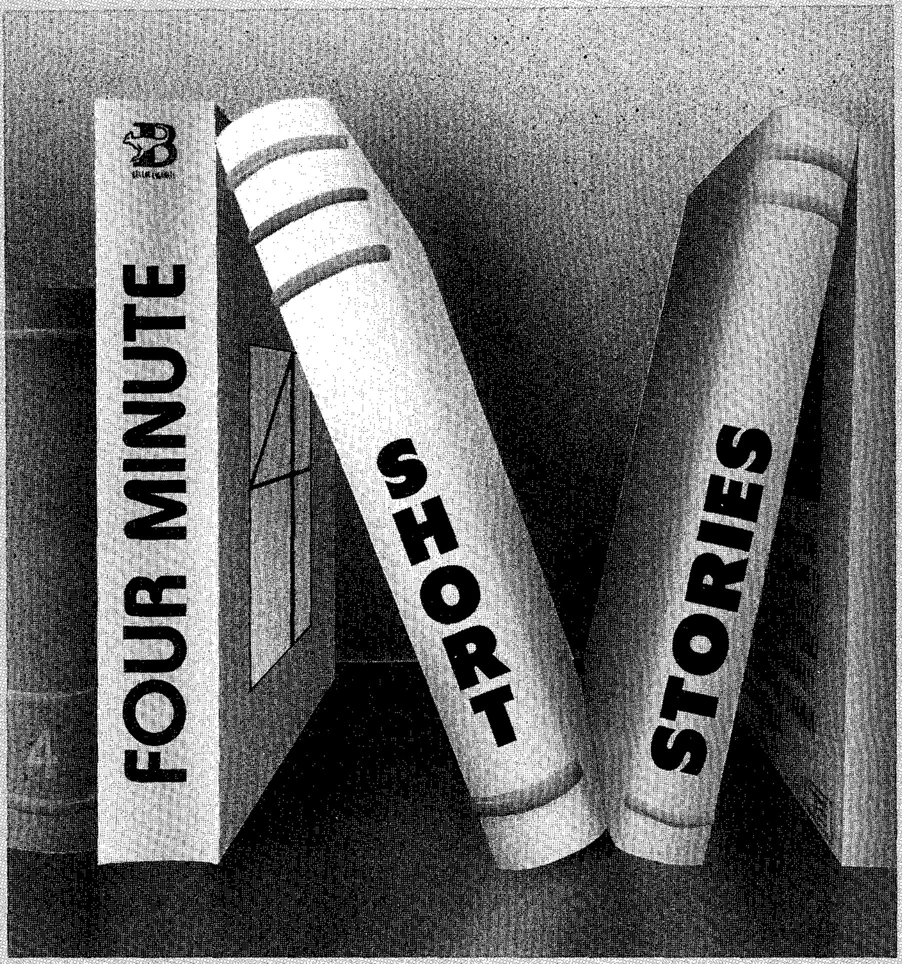
"I just told you."

Still he stood there, unable to move. Move where? For what? For a moment he thought he had said it aloud. But the girl was unwrapping a piece of gum and folding it into her mouth. Students began trickling in. They formed a line behind him. Peter pretended to study the menu on the wall. A nonce word, that was what he needed. He had to invent a word that would release him, a word that would undo. His lips moved silently, but no word came out.

The Burger Joy girl looked past him to the next person.

"Can I help you?" she said.

And Peter, undone, dropped out of the line. ☐


FOUR MINUTE
SHORT
STORIES

KATHLEEN SPIVACK	CLAUDIA MADISON
ROD KESSLER	HELEN SCHULMAN
FRAN PODULKA	ELIZABETH THOMAS
DON BLOCH	ELLEN VOTAW MILLER

NEIGHBORHOOD

KATHLEEN SPIVACK

My friend Roberta lives next door in a large house she bought for herself. This was a remarked upon event, a scandal, in fact, to the conservative small town in which we both live. Most scandalized was the real estate agent who sold to Roberta. This did not prevent the agent from making a healthy buck on her.

Ludville is that most straight-laced of suburbs, ethnic, lower-middle class, two thirds of the population being first-generation immigrants. They flowed into Ludville from Portugal, Greece, the Middle East, from the restless Levant and a few from Mexico. Reëstablishing whole families, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandmothers, they made of Ludville a patchwork of conventional respectability. Girls are chaperoned, marriages more or less arranged, and the whole town goes to church, around whose cultural and community centers its social life persists. A few bohemian couples have moved to Ludville over the years, finding the ethnic flavor appealing. They send their children to private schools eventually. But for at least a few years they manage to live cheaply among the small apartments and gardens and grape arbors of Ludville's Portuguese and Greeks.

So when Roberta, a large and capable woman, bought her house there was a flurry in our small settled neighborhood. "A single woman, a loose woman," exclaimed the complacent wives. "Why, we wouldn't ever rent to one. You never know who they might bring home." Roberta heard and bought anyway. "You know," the agent said to her, "there's another single woman in town. She's been looking for a place. You two should get together."

In fact there is more than one other single woman in Ludville, but we are all so tidied up and tucked away that we are invisible. Some of us were even married once, but since our husbands left us we aren't counted. Our households overflow with kids, no cash, and problems of all sorts. Which makes us no different from our neighbors, really. Having tried to lay us once or twice, the married men have given up and their wives who see us as a "threat" would just as soon ignore us.

So I, for one, was delighted to see Roberta move next door. The house inside was wallpapered with garish cabbage roses; her furniture filled all of one room, and "Is your husband home?" asked the oil man, coming to fix the burner.

Soon Roberta and I were visiting over our adjoining fence; my kids were dropping in on her to be fed and, like stray cats, they always turned up at suppertime in her green and red-rosed kitchen. I told her to shoo them off.

At night, when the soft spring darkens, raccoons roam through our neighborhood, sticking their snouts in the garbage cans that are accidentally left out. The lids fall off with a great clatter, the cans crashing and rolling. The married men go outside on their stoops and shout at the raccoons. And sometimes they are effective. The animals furtively slink away; go off to overturn cans a few streets away. The single women, in bed, hear the noise of the coons in the cans but, like me, are too tired to get out of bed and shout. But the married men stand out on the stoops, their arms folded, feeling the dark, smoking sometimes, protecting their families and looking up at our lighted windows.

Once, coming home myself in the dark, working late, I encountered a skunk in my driveway leading two skunks off my porch steps where apparently they had been scavenging. The mother looked at me and I at her, both backing away respectfully. And I went and sat in Roberta's kitchen until I thought skunk-dangers had passed.

There is a large tree between Roberta's yard and mine, from which, in the highest branches issue shrill screams. "The raccoons are mating!" cry the children in piping carrying voices. "Talk like that is disgusting!" warn the married women from their kitchens, sending their husbands out to deal with the situation. In the glare of torchlight up above us, raccoons, backs arched, fur standing on end, stare wildly at each other. They hang in the trees, mounting each other and screaming. Have you ever heard a raccoon mate? They are more passionate and shrill than women. The nights are pierced by their savage indulgences; the trees sway with lust.

The little houses of Ludville darken. The husbands stand on back stoops, flick out their cigarettes and go inside. Lights of bedrooms flicker first on and, after what seems a long time, they go off.

My children and I remain standing beneath the great maple, the branches of which still sway to raccoons' screams. "They're still mating," my children whisper. They too fall quiet, in awe of being awake so late.

Now the lights of Roberta's house start to go off also. The cabbage-rose red wallpaper gives way to blank darkness. I can follow, from where I stand in my yard, her progress from kitchen, alone in that great huge house, upstairs through the hall to the bathroom and finally into her bedroom, the front one. The raccoons, at roof height up in the tree are still swaying and moaning. Roberta turns out her bedroom light, comes to the open window and leans onto the sill. She doesn't know we—any of us, I, coons, or children—are there. And now, fulfilling the worst fears of Ludville, predictions of real estate agents, the wishes of all horny husbands and threatened wives, she starts to sing and moan. "I want a man!" she cries to the darkness. "A man! A man! I must have a man!" She gets louder, going up the scales. The raccoons growl and shriek and jump on each other with lust. "I must have a man!" And now all the little married houses start to shake and shriek and rattle. "Sex! Sex! We must have it," scream the raccoons. All the neighbor bedrooms have women in their windows, following Roberta in chorus. "I want it! I want it!" The entire town of Ludville howls its irrepressible longings into the darkness. "I must! I must!" screams Roberta, leading us all.

And there in the night, surrounded by longings in Ludville, hearing the animals echoing and screeching, I too give it a try. All the longings, the marital bedrooms, are going wild, led by Roberta who leans our her window, bellowing. Alone in my garden, the soul of celibate discretion, I *whisper, "I must have a man," tasting that* phrase, the desire, then speak louder and louder. And begin to believe it. ☐

"The mother skunk looked at me and I at her, both backing away respectfully. . . . I went and sat in Roberta's kitchen until I thought skunk-dangers had passed."

> ". . . When I got back, Mother was in a crouch like an infielder, her housedress brushing the dirt where it dipped down between her legs."

I must be cautious about speaking of happy times in my family. I was older than I should have been when I realized that the occasions we five children reminisce about were not happy times for us at all. Rather, on outings, picnics, and holidays we had pretended to be happy." Tears might already be puddling in the creases one of the children got cranky or our father lost his temper, Mother would say "Can't you please just *try* to be happy." Tears might be already puddling in the creases by her mouth. Our father would be too far gone in his bad mood to try, and some of the children were too young to understand what was expected of them, but the rest of us would fix brittle smiles and interested expressions on our faces. Early on I recognized these expressions on my brother's face. I thought he was a phony until I was much older and realized I had arranged my own face just as carefully as he had his.

But the day I want to talk about was happy, I think, without our having to try hard to make it so.

It was a Saturday. Father's restless nature never allowed him to spend a weekend day at home without having a rage about something, but he worked overtime that day. This was a boon to him, whose chronic complaint was that his greedy children were making him flat broke. It was a boon to the rest of us, too, because we were never really comfortable with him around.

Jack was the baby then, and, as I recall, he'd slept dry through the night for the first time. It was a small thing, but enough to cheer our mother who was depressed most of the time and overwhelmed by how much her children needed.

Mother expected relatives for Sunday dinner next day, so she and I got the house ready, stowing away all the baby and toddler toys, dusting, and scrubbing. It wasn't often that we cleaned so thoroughly, though Mother always said she liked nothing better than to sit in a nice clean house. I asked her once why we didn't just clean it up every Saturday, since she liked it so much. She didn't answer but gave me a characteristic look, like she'd never seen me before in her life and hadn't the slightest notion of what I was talking about.

■

BALL GAME

CLAUDIA MADISON

The two little girls played in the yard. Jack stayed in his pen, and I moved it from room to room and talked to him while I worked. After lunch Mother made a molded salad for next day, and I cleaned spots off all the drinking glasses.

Nothing went wrong, no fighting or accidents, to upset Mother. By mid-afternoon, she was sitting in the orderly house as she liked to do, and the little children were taking naps. She told me I could go outside and play.

My brother was already out in the vacant lot next to our yard. The lot was the neighborhood playground, pounded bare of weeds and grass by much bicycle riding, running, and scuffing. It was my favorite place.

There were no other neighborhood kids out that Saturday. I batted fielding practice for my brother—high fly balls and grounders. This was my only athletic talent. I could not hit a ball pitched to me to save my soul, and I was not very good at catching or throwing.

I mindlessly hit balls until the shadow of the phone pole in front of the lot was just beginning to swing around and lengthen. Mother came out of the house with a book like she was going to sit in what she called "the arbor," a spindly construction of chicken wire and morning glory vines. Instead, she came out the back gate and stood beside me with her hands on her hips for at least a full minute. I didn't know what she wanted. Her blue eyes looked clear, for a change *not* like she was about to cry.

My brother's old glove was lying by my feet. He always brought his bat, his two gloves, our old ball for practice, and, should a real game develop, our new ball, bought just the month before and the cover not yet resewn.

Mother put her book down and picked up the old glove. She fitted it to her hand, gave it a punch, and took it off and moved the strap over one notch. She put it on again and trotted to the back of the field, motioning for my brother to move over away from her some. He was so befuddled by Mother being out in the field that he wasn't watching what he was doing and threw the ball right past me. I was pretty dumbfounded too and just let the ball go by. I had to go out to the street for it, and when I got back, Mother was in a crouch like an infielder, her housedress brushing the dirt where it dipped down between her legs.

At first I was afraid of hurting her and hit easy grounders and high-lob fly balls right to her. But she moved pretty well, so I let rip and hit the balls all over the field like always. They took turns catching and kept track of points: three for line drives (which I hardly ever hit), two for flies, one for grounders.

I don't believe I'd ever heard my brother laugh when either of my parents was around, but he did that day, at something—I didn't hear what—Mother said to him. The younger children finished their naps and one-by-one came out to the back yard. They lined up along the chain-link fence and cheered when the ball was caught. Jack clapped and laughed when the others did.

We were all a little drunk on Mother's good humor. And if that wasn't enough, our father came home from work and stripped off his outside shirt and went out to the field, too. Mother and my brother started their game over so he could play, and we didn't count line drives which he couldn't catch without a glove.

I don't know how long the game lasted. It was long enough, as a look back at the younger kids in the yard showed me, for Jack to have piddled his pants and then sat in the dirt so the back of his shorts was muddy. I figured there would be heck to pay for that, but in the meantime I thwocked that baseball out to my parents like my life depended on it. □

MR. INTEGRITY FOR 1987

ROD KESSLER

She means two tiny flecks on separate fingers—the ring finger and the middle—two microscopic clots that anyone could prize out with a toothpick or the sharp point of a paper clip. She is saying that they're disgusting, my fingernails. I should take more care. She brings my hand closer to her eye as though she's a jeweler about to appraise the stone on my ring. But I am wearing no ring. I'm looking directly at the top of her head now, as she's bending over me. She's beginning to get some gray hairs. Not many.

"Look," I say. "It's not going to show up in the shots anyway. Can we get going?" I think of myself as a clean person. I would never give those flecks a second thought. The woman still has my hand in hers, though, and her palms are hot. In my line of work, the hands I touch are—but people would rather not know the details. Suffice it to say that the mortuary business is almost entirely instrumentalized and that hygienic standards are maintained. I pull my hand free. The flecks under my fingernails are not composed of what some people would like to think.

"I'm sorry," the woman says. She steps back and nudges one of the silver reflectors. "I'm hypersensitive to personal cleanliness. I know it."

She's got me on a stool and now, with the lamps on, the air is hot. She's making adjustments to the tripod, raising the big camera a couple of inches. If I crane my head to the left, I can catch my reflection in a wall mirror. I am not a vain man. But with the dark suit, the dark tie, the silver hair, I look respectable.

"There was this one man I lusted after for years," she says. "But he'd been living with another woman. You know? And besides that, she was a friend of mine." She steps over to the lamp at my left and moves it a few inches, staring all the while at my face. I suppose she's trying to put me at ease with her patter.

"Well, anyway, about two months ago they broke up. I had nothing to do with that. It was the woman who told me. Things were kaput." She makes a quiet gesture with her hands to show me how kaput things were. "Then a couple of weeks later, he calls me up and asks me to come out to Nantucket Island with him for the weekend."

The woman is more interested in telling me the story than in taking my portrait. "Do you know about European men?" she asks. "They don't bathe."

I am sweating because the studio lights are right on me. The woman doesn't care.

"I didn't notice until I stood downwind from him on the ferry. How could I not have noticed? And his hair! My God! It was so waxy with lard, it wouldn't even blow in the wind." She tells me about the flecks of lint in his hair and the stain, the slight stain, under the armpits of Dirk's shirt. The man's name was Dirk. He was from Belgium or Holland.

She goes back to the camera now and squints through the viewfinder. She stands back and takes a good, long look at me. "The thing is," she says, "I couldn't bring myself to do it with him. You know what I mean?"

I know what she means.

"But how was I supposed to explain that to him? That's what I want to know." She touches her pudgy hand to her cheek. "We hadn't even docked on the Island yet and I *knew*. What should I have done? What would have been right?"

She's posing the question to me, I realize, because of the civic award. It surprises me the attention people give a thing like this—the attention, the publicity. I am literally thrust in front of cameras. And everyone expects me to know the upright thing to do.

"Why not tell him he needs a shower?" I ask.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," she says. "I couldn't hurt his feelings like that."

This woman is still young, still in her mid-thirties. She has large hips and now she takes her hand away from the camera and rests it on one large hip.

"You didn't mind telling me my fingernails were disgusting," I point out.

"That's different," she says. "That's for your own good."

Her reasoning strikes me as opaque. "Why didn't you try to clean him up anyway—make him swim in the ocean or take a shower with you. You could have said that the scent of soap on a man's body alone drives you wild."

She goes back to the viewfinder and then adjusts a dial on the camera. "It was too late," she says. "I was already turned off."

"So what happened?" I ask.

"Could you please tilt your head this way?" she says, showing me with a movement of her hand.

I tilt my head.

"Look into the lens," she says.

I can see an image of her eye floating in the lens.

"I told him I had a headache," she says. "And that I wasn't in the mood. He wasn't thrilled."

"And that was that?" I ask.

"Hold still."

I watch the woman behind the camera. The frock draping her body fits like window curtains. Maybe it's the fabric that makes me think that. Her charms aren't endless, though—that's clear. It interests me that the man of her fantasies—the very man!—had eventually turned up. So, he was flawed. But fatally? In my business, certainly, we run through our share of soap and disinfectant. A body—well, she passed up her chance. I suspect that she is unhappy now. I put it to her.

"Unhappy?" she asks, looking up from the camera, a long cable in her paw. "The trouble is, there are no decent men around. Or if they are, they're married."

She has to tell me not to move again.

"I wonder about that a lot," she says. "I mean, attracting a good man. As a man, what do you think I should do?"

Knock off about twenty pounds and take a lesson in tact is the honest answer. That's what comes into my head anyway. *Lose twenty pounds.*

All this time she is snapping pictures.

"Just keep trying," I tell her. "Dirk liked you, right? There are plenty more where he came from."

She clicks the shutter and then says, "But they don't bathe, remember?"

I tell her it's a figure of speech. "Lovers are like buses," I say. "Wait long enough and another one comes along."

She snorts. I can't tell what she means. Maybe she's heard that one before.

"Be patient," I say. "Time sorts everyone out."

Actually, it's my business to know that. Time does sort everyone out. I can picture her naked on the slab. I can picture her with her eyes left open or with her eyes closed. It's something that comes with the job.

The prints are probably out of the chemicals the next day, but I get my first look when everyone else does, when the magazine comes out with all the publicity. Mr. Integrity for 1987. And if they aren't the perfect image of it too—clear and as candid as can be, right down to the bright little flecks in my eyes. ☐

"Suffice it to say that the mortuary business is almost entirely instrumentalized and hygienic standards are maintained."

"Appearances, the only thing we all agreed on, was the stuff that counted most."

It began this way, with ignorance. Each was sure she was the only one.

We were in mourning.

We were having ourselves some fun.

Because it wasn't every day that the respective neighbors baked up pies, skimmed cream, sent over their garden best. It wasn't all the while that a various mother—hers: sobthroated and puddled; the other one's: flitting wingless with distraction—failed to notice a jammy mouth lipsticked thick by a wand of Sweet Orange, and in one case Gingeree. We were petted, and left to our own devices. We were bypassed and made much of.

It was the same in the twin households of mother and daughter, one located in Florida, the other in Rome: border towns in the plaid surprise of upstate New York, the cross-weave that came from a lushness and poverty of color, from the twenty-two shades of green one of us had ticked off, to the hollow brown and dirty grey of the laundry lines, the backroad houses, the gullies and the ditches, the Happy Homes trailer park. In both our kitchens there was a mother, each in her own language, bent on carrying on—and carrying off with all of the attention, because it was time to steal the limelight, because callers had come to fuss.

Appearances, the only thing we all agreed on, was the stuff that counted most.

So after the old man passed on, what it was that we both found most concerning, what was nearest to the innermost chambers of our hearts—it was shoes.

Sare conjures hers as lace-up. Rho glimmers Mary Janes of a shiny patent rose. For each other we memorized ruby slippers, and Cinderella's glass pumps outfitted with heels of gold.

At a burial these things are signifying, especially when a girl figured on being the star.

And after years—for one of us six, for the other somewhere next to seven—of barefooting it, each had two little

■

WE WERE OF TWO MINDS

HELEN SCHULMAN

brown loaves, ten breadsticks, to gussy-up and package so that it was a best foot forward. No half-steps but a two-step for a missy about to pay final respects to the tobacco-sweated, hard-bellied worker whose striped shirt for Sundays made it seem like his chest still had some heaving to go. Laid out that way (in a box he built for himself at neither of our two houses, but somewhere inbetween where each swing of his axe was a semblance of his finally dividing himself up even) those striples were illusion-making of plumped raisin lungs, of growing vines for innards.

So for Sare who had tiptoe power, and for Rho who still needed to be caught underarmed and swung birds-eyed above the casket, the results were that although one was a downlooker and the other had to sideways her stare up, we both swore that he was still breathing. It was in this arc of flying directions that our two gazes met and locked and rained down the hot disappointment of not being the only daughter left by the dead man to reign over his parting do.

The envy one felt for one another was pea-green and electrifying. Both cried out in jealousy over the other's finer shoes.

It didn't help when a mutual aunt shrieked "Poor dears, to meet this way over their father at the graveyard."

So it was clear.

When each saw each with feet decked out just-so, and awfully hotsy-totsy, recognition is what it was. We both spied something real familiar in the other, a dash of what made ourselves ourselves: freckles, white lashes, upper lips lined with peachy fuzz.

It's fair to say surprise is what we felt and something close to murder. Usually a sister is a person to be realized when the second of the same is born.

Now when we focus on back neither will own up as the first suspects the next as being retarded enough to grab a starter clod of grave-dirt and ground out on the other's partied feet.

It was a red-earth clay fight. It was a ruckus riot.

When we were pulled apart, our shoes in a state of unmendable ruination, the four feet got jumbled and we had to divvy up our unmarked toes. What was once pure separation: singular schools, different denominations, last names of an uncorresponding sort, hers being hers and vice versa, were forever mixings in a bowl.

After the funeral of the Daddy we had in common, Sare and Rho, us two, have been tied like those Siamese, joined at the hip, hitched at the waist, never letting go. And though those mothers of ours kept catfighting on their own we managed to keep our roots entwined. Two cooks may spoil the broth, but two heads are better and stuck together there wasn't anything we couldn't get done.

Except for one.

Since nobody thought to tell us we were both sides of a looking-glass family, Sare and her mom in their town, Rho and hers in another—with Daddy lickety-splitting it back and forth and back and forth, his secret riding his heart like a two-tonner until he broke, we never bothered to confess.

It was us that killed him, Daddy. Two was one too many of what would have been his right amount of kids. But it is our pact that keeps us going, that links our minds as one, so that we'll never move nor even marry, so that we've promised to never part. Our pact: Not to make a judgment—we'll leave that up to Him—on who it was that should have been lady enough to puzzle it out and when the pieces all matched up announce aloud which was his truest, and which was the daughter to get shunned; then gather her skirts, no wave nor turnback, but with a graceful bow-out, kick off her shoes and run. □

TRANSLATIONS

FRAN PODULKA

The poet is home for the weekend, between readings and lectures, on a stop so close to home he almost had to. He is in his room the morning of a clear spring sky. Spring, at last, after a hard Midwest winter. A late Spring, the days coming hot too soon for the lettuce and spinach in the kitchen garden his mother still keeps.

Sleeping, she thinks, he needs the rest, let him and she wraps the fresh fruit in Saran again and puts it away. She thought she heard him up once or twice and wonders if lunch, something more substantial than eggs, would be better. He has become a big man, sedentary and sad, a sadness he seems to carry in his belly like the fetus of a long, sick pregnancy. He is very silent this visit. An odd thing, she thinks, in a man so full of language and thought. Perhaps he is up there writing now, not sleeping. Up there dreaming, extending some dream into his shape of reality, getting it down. She goes into the garden to work, to calm herself.

Shortly after noon he appears, stands on the back porch fresh from a shower, gleaming, his blue shirt like a swatch of sky. At her side, he watches her thin the buttercrunch, watches her turn the dark loam with a hand trowel. He says, "Morning, mother." Then helps her to her feet and carries a flat of petunias to the flower bed for her.

"Leave them in the shade, while we eat," she says.

The table is too large around with all the leaves in. Fine for five of them, when the family was together, but not for years now. His father never again. She begins with questions, as if they were strangers meeting for the first time. In his answers he gives nothing more than is asked and asks nothing himself. She tells him anyway.

She carries the plates away, pours more coffee, tells him she would like to hear him read, wants to go with him to the small college where he is eagerly awaited. She has seen the announcements in the local paper.

"It doesn't matter if you'll be busy. I'll come back on the train. You can pretend I'm not there. Don't you think I can take care of myself?"

The issue is undecided the whole day. He writes, organizes papers; she gets the petunias in, afraid that it has become too hot for planting. Things take longer to do now. The blossoms have sucked in on themselves, parched. She arranges hoses, turns on the water and goes inside to make supper. They will eat in the yard, on the old wooden table where he used to sit reading in the grove of firs, or scribbling. He used to call it scribbling when she asked what he was doing. She would look out of a window and see him staring up into the green whorls of branches.

The hard thing is his silence with her. It seems almost necessary to him, as if he gained something from it but it does not make her feel important to him. She thinks he must be that way with everyone now and that is why he is alone. Women leave him, take his children and leave. She misses them, the women and the children who used to come and love the freedom of the fields, the big house. He lives now in small, confining places, tied to certain formalities. He lives in graduate apartments, trailers, rooms in the houses of strangers. Impersonal arrangements, a mean way to live, no way to live, she thinks, always moving on.

Does he choose this now or is he blind to what has happened? He goes when called, speaks when asked, reads his works when they are published and sometimes, now that he has a reputation, works in progress. She wants to know more, hear more, have him say something important about himself as if she were in that audience he cared about, lived for. But after supper he says he is leaving without her. He gives her a copy of the new book and tries to explain. "I write for the page," he says. "I'm not a good reader; it's better on the page." He loves her, she knows that. That's not it.

In the evening, after he's gone, she turns on a lamp and reads into the evening. Absorbs his words. It comes to her suddenly that he speaks two languages now: the page voice of his poems, deep, sonorous, full of possibilities and not always sad. It is the halting language of everyday that seems to be failing him, as if he had left the country of his birth at a young age and lost the mother tongue. He is like a foreigner struggling with an unfamiliar syntax, who cannot easily initiate conversation, can answer only in the simplest contexts. She puts the thin book down, open to a long poem: *Synthesis #10 in Accord with What Happened I Think*. She does not understand all the poems. The page shines in the light. The broken lines shimmer, black on white, like pebbles under fast flowing water. When she takes her glasses off they merge and blur. She does not want to read that particular poem. She does not want to know what happened, she thinks now.

There is a sound: water, water running and she remembers the hoses. The lawn is soaked and moves under each step. In the glare of the yardlight the petunias lie flattened like spineless creatures pulled from a night sea. Too much of a good thing. She turns the water off and back in the house makes herself an iced tea and takes it, along with a few biscuits and a spoonful of orange marmalade, into the living room. The book lies open, the pages shining in the light, all the words waiting, and after setting down her glass and the plate on the lamp table, she sits down herself. She glances at her watch. He would be getting ready now, his people waiting for him. She breathes on the lenses of her glasses and wipes them dry with the hem of her skirt. She slips the glasses on, picks up the book and begins to read. □

"Women leave him, take his children and leave. . . . She misses them, the women and children who used to come and love the freedom of the fields. . . ."

■

DRIVING INTO THE LIGHT

ELIZABETH THOMAS

I brought my children to this country for safety. My husband was killed after the war was over—and we had lived through it all—because he had worked as a driver for the American embassy. It was just a job to him—better than driving a cyclo or a taxi. But they killed him for it anyway, dragged him out of the house and shot him in the head. I saw it from a neighbor's house. I started to scream and would have run clawing at them—but my neighbor and her son held me down and covered my mouth or the men would have shot me too. I thank god that our children didn't see it—they have seen so much else.

I told them the truth, because the truth finds its way out anyway, and because I had to talk to someone who loved him too. I told them "Baba is dead. The men from the new government came and killed him. We are all we have left now, we must try to be good to each other." I was sitting on the edge of our bed, my husband's and mine, and the children were all gathered around my knees looking at my face with staring black eyes. I remember my daughter had mud smudged on one cheek and on her neck and dress—probably from playing near the rice paddies. The day before I would have scolded her for it.

The children said nothing, but just stood huddled around my knees. They knew *dead* and they knew *father* but I don't think they really knew yet what it meant—your father is dead. They knew only the sad tone of my voice.

They know now, but still they know only the loss of what they loved and depended on—a quiet careful man who made them things, carved them boats out of wood and folded grasses into green braided crickets. They do not have to hold the memory of him fighting and screaming and calling my name in the dirt road outside our house. I am glad for that.

Inside our house here is not so different from the house we had at home. It has cement walls and floors, only here the floors are covered with streaky brown linoleum. The house there was dim and the cement floor and walls were cool in the hot afternoons. My husband was very proud to move us out of a bamboo house on stilts and into a real cement one.

Once he stopped at the house in the middle of the day in his embassy car. He was very proud of it, long and black with dark tinted windows and a small American flag flying in the front. He wouldn't let anyone touch it. The children crowded around and wanted to get in. He waved them away and polished off their dusty hand prints with his white handkerchief. The grownups hung back—the men spat betel and asked him questions and wanted to get inside too, but did not say so. He showed us how the windows slid up and down by buttons in the front, and told us how the whole car, glass and doors and all, was plated with lead which made it bullet proof. He had on the starched white short-sleeved shirt I pressed for him the night before, and a black cap with a shiny brim that matched his shoes which he shined every night. He looked so cool and clean that day—no sweat marks under his armpits, no crumpled sticky shirt, like the rest of us, because of the air conditioning in the car.

I wish, sometimes, we could have put the children in that cool, safe, shiny-black, bullet-proof car, and driven away that day. I see myself sitting in the front, with him—his cap is off and we are talking. And the children are playing noisily in the back seat area, which is as big as our small kitchen. I wish we could have driven for miles and miles—till we reached Thailand. We could have driven all night, my husband and I talking in the dark front seat, the children sleeping in the back.

We live on the fifth floor of an apartment building here. Our windows face away from the sun. It is dark and colder than we are used to. Even in summer my hands and feet are always cold.

The two boys walk like American boys. They slouch into their jackets, keep their arms close to their sides, even when they talk and, although they are only nine and eleven, walk on the streets as if they were very brave. They wear tee-shirts printed with the names of rock stars

■

and drink cow's milk all the time. They are growing so fast their pant legs always seem to be up above their ankles. This embarrasses them. They are like garden flowers that, moved to new soil, suddenly grow like weeds.

When I was pregnant with my daughter the old ladies at the market would say, "See how low it rides. It will be a boy." And my friends all said, "See how it kicks, it will be a boy." She used to try and play like the boys, wrapped like a little monkey around the trunk of a papaya tree—trying to shinny up as high as her brothers. She would tumble off back into the dirt so that she was as brown-faced and -armed as a monkey. She would tear her clothes. I scolded her more than I ever scolded the boys. I took her to market with me, tried to teach her to sew and cook, but before we left she could wriggle all the way up to the top of the papayas.

Now I scold her "Go to the playground with your brothers, little buffalo face." The boys roll their eyes and look at each other, but they love her and would take her down the fast, dangerous streets and watch her play. But she shakes her head and sits by the heating vent looking out the window. She is like a baby bird stranded high up in a banyan tree.

Some days she draws: pictures of mud-crusted water buffaloes, luna moths, tattered chickens. Things she used to see every day. We have no photographs and I think these drawings are her photographs. She lies on the floor right by the heater until the skin on the back of her neck turns red, as if from sunburn, and draws. On my days off sometimes I sit and watch her—the picture taking form on the floor between her bony elbows, below the thick hair that falls covering her eyes from me. Sometimes I know where she is.

We had chickens in the backyard—one rooster and some hens. The rooster was rust and greeny-black and the hens were speckled dirty white. She used to like to lie on her belly in the dirt and watch them peck for food and squabble. Sometimes she would chase them, waving her arms like the wings of a great mean bird and screeching. I would call "Stop that—come inside now" out the kitchen window and her wings would disappear down to her sides and she would disappear off to play somewhere else.

There was also a vegetable garden, melon vines crawling across the ground and beans up on stick frames that my husband built. Huge pale green luna moths would float above the garden and praying mantises would crouch on the leaves, moving their front legs up and down, up and down. She used to like to lie in the sun, like a little lizard, completely still, following anything that moved with her eyes.

My cousin lives in Stockton. He has a house with a garden and his wife raises ducks and chickens. He says in summer it is hot like Cambodia and tells me I should move there. But I have a good job here as a maid for a lady who lives in a big house in the hills. When her children are not at school I eat lunch with them. She gives me their old clothes and once an old radio which I brought home to the boys. They listen to it at night when they should be asleep. I hear it whispering and whining through the bedroom walls and pretend it is cicadas singing in the garden outside.

Cousin says I should send my daughter to live with him since she is so unhappy in the city. But I can't. She sleeps with me, curled up against me at night warm, like she used to be.

If my husband were here maybe we would have a car and some Sunday in the summer he would drive us down to Stockton. As it got warmer we would sweat on the plastic seats. We would keep the windows open and the air would blow in like from a giant heater. And on both sides of the road would be big green fields and I would say, "See monkey face, they look like rice paddies," and she would stare out the window. I would make her brothers give her a window seat, and the wind would brush the hair back out of her eyes. And when we got to cousin's house I would open the dark car door and she would hurtle out, running into the light. □

"I started to scream . . . but my neighbor covered my mouth . . ."

FREE ASSOCIATION

DON BLOCH

I.

Mary	*Tom*	*Larry*
Flame	thrower	tongue
kiss	chocolate	melt
drop	fall	spring
Greece	Turkey	stuffing
pilgrim	Mecca	ballroom
chandelier	cock	bull
flight	hurt	ring
finger	joint	high
acid	scar	birth
pills	death	don't want
Don Juan	Mozart	cavity
drill	army	draft
window	bars	dark
eyes	nose	yes
Scotch	more	naked
cold	storage	meat.

It was Mary who suggested they play the game. At first Tom objected that he was too tired. But that would help, she explained, not hinder. Larry had never played before. You just say the first thing that comes into your head, Mary told him. But he didn't really understand. When it was his turn, practically every time, he took much longer than the others.

"Come on," Tom urged more than once, snapping his fingers. "Say something."

"There's no hurry," Mary said. "Give him time."

They lay on Tom's hooked rug in front of the open fire. Their legs were spread like the spokes of a wheel, their heads touching at the hub.

"You're supposed to be associating with what *I* say, not what *she* says," Tom commented, rolling his eyes towards Larry.

"I am."

"Sometimes you don't."

"Like when?" Larry was enjoying the sight of the shadows cast by the fire dancing across the white ceiling, like light on water.

"I didn't want to butt in and stop the game, but take my word for it."

The three friends knew each other long and well. Mary had recently been divorced. Larry had failed to win tenure at his job teaching law. If Tom had no special disaster to share on this occasion, it was, he said, because his life itself was a disaster. At college Mary and Larry had been lovers. Tom knew that. Everyone did. Tom and Mary had also had an affair at the same time. Mary had told Larry but Tom never knew if his friend was aware of the fact. All that had happened half a lifetime ago.

They shared a history of playing different games together. Now each had a tumbler of whiskey which stood on the worn rug at about waist level. Mary, however, was the only bona fide drinker of the three. There were ashtrays, too, down at the point where their hands just reached.

Mary kicked her shoes off, wriggled her toes. Her feet were the closest to the fire.

"What if we change the order now?" Mary rolled onto one side. A silver filigree earring flopped forward onto her cheek.

"What're we trying to prove?" Larry asked.

"You start, Larry," Tom said.

"Me? Okay."

Mary lay back with one arm folded across her eyes. Far away outside you could hear the rush of traffic over the Mystic River bridge. "Relax," she said, and squeezed her both friends' hands. "Flow with it."

"We're waiting, Larry," Tom said. "Any time you're ready."

II.

Larry	*Tom*	*Mary*
Life	magazine	shiny
helmet	crack	woman
go	green	envy
sin	sex	male
model	computer	game
shoot	laundry	wet
pants	fly	spider
legs	Mary	Jesus
knees	God bless you	polite
Poland	joke	spit out
phlegm	ugh, slimy	snake
bite	suck	uh, swallow
spring	mattress	bed
sleep	dream	sweet
chocolate	pudding	

Instead of continuing, Mary complained that Tom was just making up anything. He wasn't trying to free associate with what Larry said, but he wanted to be clever. Tom reminded them that he hadn't wanted to play the game in the first place.

"So now you're spoiling it for the others," Mary said, "like always." During the brief silence that followed, a log split in the fire and there was an upward cascade of sparks.

"Some of the things you say don't make any sense," Mary went on.

"They're not supposed to make *sense*," Tom retorted. At the same time he didn't exactly deny the spirit of her accusation. He sat up and used the tongs leaning against the fireplace to move the pieces of the split log close together again.

"I like the game," Larry said. "It defeats time." He drank off the rest of his Scotch and then poured another for himself and the others. In the firelight the liquor glowed amber. On the top of Larry's drink floated little slivers of ice which he tapped at with one finger, then licked the finger.

Actually Mary was having a hard time hearing Tom when it was his turn to say a word. He spoke in a dreamy, quiet voice. She didn't like to admit it, but in her left ear she was practically deaf by now. "Why do you always have to ruin other people's fun," she said to Tom.

He smiled, first at her and then at the fire. "Why do you have to make a test out of everything?"

III.

"Ready?" Larry said. "Shall we go on? We could change the order again."

"No, we can't," Tom and Mary said at once, brightening.

"With three people," Tom went on, "there are only two possible sequences."

"What if Mary goes first—"

"Think, stupid," Mary cut in. "Use your highly trained legal intelligence."

"Give him more rope," Tom laughed. "Let him finish."

Without his glasses, Mary thought, Tom looked so different, his eyes small and far away, his forehead large and menacing. His skin glowed red now from the fire.

"If Mary starts," Larry pointed at Mary with his index finger. Her lips rippled and her dark eyes grew large with merriment. The fine white finger moved from person to person and back again, coming to rest against Larry's own chest. "No, I see what you mean." Larry lay down again. "Well, I'll start."

"And then me?" Tom asked. He climbed over Mary to change places. The friends now made themselves comfortable, pressing the tops of their heads against each other. It was so reassuring, while it lasted, not to be alone.

"Only this time try to say the *first* thing that comes into your heads, no matter what," Mary said. "Otherwise you defeat the whole purpose of the game."

"Ready?"

Tom	*Larry*	*Mary*
Private	parts	whole
wheat	fields	Mae West
diamonds	South Africa	Apartheid
blacks	whites	Reagan
Contras	lies	CIA
stupid	Reagan	murder
manual	mass	Pope
Poland	Warsaw	camps
gas	graves	SS
Reagan	shaking	old
grey mare	nitemare	fire
missiles	war	bomb
nothing.		

"Why do you have to make a test out of everything?"

BLACKBERRIES

ELLEN VOTAW MILLER

Just before noon the husband came down the near slope of the hill carrying his cap filled with blackberries. "They're ripe now. This week," he said to his wife. "We chose the right week to come." He was a tall man, slender-limbed but thickening now through the center of his body. He walked around the tent to where the canvas water bag hung, spilled the berries into an aluminum pan, and began to wash them gently.

"There isn't any milk left," his wife said. She was blonde and fragile, still pretty in a certain light and with a careful arrangement of her features. "We finished the milk." She sat up from the blanket spread on the ground and laid aside the book she had been reading. "Albert and Mae went to New York," she said. "It's a tour. A theater tour."

"You told me that," he replied. "We can put these in cups. Cups will make fine berry bowls."

"There isn't any milk."

"I saw cattails," he said. "You'd think there would be too much woods for them. They need sun, but they're there. You can slice up cattail root and fry it. In butter. We have butter. It's good." He divided the berries into two cups and set one cup on the blanket beside his wife. He rummaged through the kitchen box and found a spoon, then began to eat his berries slowly and carefully, making them last.

"The tour covers everything," she said. "You only pay once. You pay one price."

"There aren't any bears here," he said, "nor dangerous snakes. It would be different if we were camped in a dangerous place. It's not like that here."

The woman smoothed the blanket she was sitting on with small, careful motions, as if making a bed. "It's going to be hot," she said. "There aren't any clouds, not even small ones."

"We can swim," he suggested, savoring his berries. "You always liked swimming. You're good at it."

"No, I'm not," she said. "I'm not good at it at all."

"You look great in a bathing suit. You always did. We have powdered milk."

"It has a funny taste."

"That green, silky bathing suit was the first one I ever saw you in."

"If we went down for milk we could go to the movie in the village. It was a musical. I looked when we drove through."

"They're probably only open on weekends," he said. "A little town like that. Powdered milk's okay."

"You don't like it at home. You told me you don't like powdered milk."

"I didn't say that," he replied. "Do you want me to go for the cattail root?"

"It's margarine," she said. "We have margarine, not butter."

"I'll fry them up."

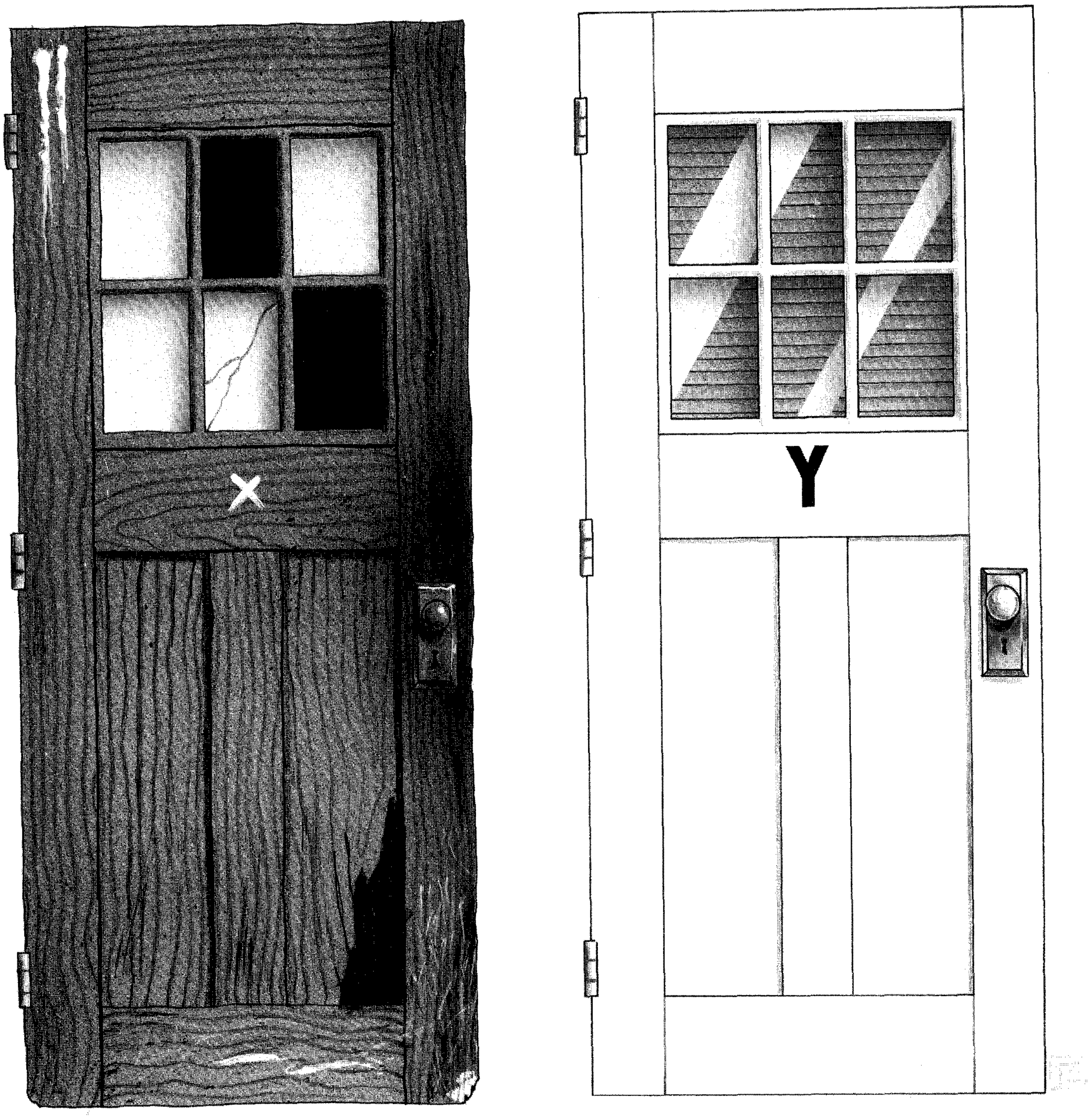
"They're probably protected, like trillium."

"You can pick cattails," he said. "Nobody cares about cattails."

He went to the pile of fire logs and began splitting them, crouching, the hatchet working in clean, economical strokes. She watched him. He was good at splitting wood. The arc of arm and shoulder swung in smoothly to aim each blow. "The summer's almost over," she said, taking one berry into her mouth. She mashed it with her tongue, chewed and swallowed. The sun passed its zenith and she saw a stripe of shadow appear on the grass beside her husband, a silhouette slim as a boy, tender as memory. She began to eat the berries in twos and threes, picking them out with her fingers, forgoing a spoon. "It's almost September."

He turned to look at her. "No, it's not," he said. "It isn't, and it's scarcely noon. We have lots of time." □

"'The tour covers everything,' she said. 'You pay one price.'"



STEERING CLEAR

Perry Glasser

Aaron Pendergrast could smile big as a pumpkin, and he smiled most of the time. He was a happy man, and how many men can you say that about? His friends paid no heed to the whispers that Jamie was just too perky and quick to be the product of any union between Grete and Aaron. What difference? Jamie was ten, and Aaron had been beside Grete since Jamie's birth. If that's not enough for some people to qualify a man to be a father, then some people maybe have to rethink what's important. We understand what's important hereabouts. We liked Aaron Pendergrast. We knew him.

Grete had blonde hair and a figure that made a man glance away and think how he'd settled for not enough. She laughed easily, and it made you feel good to be near her when she laughed. A comer with a Denver surveying company, she'd quit our high school when she was a senior cheerleader to marry Aaron just before Jamie was born. You wanted somebody to make your office run better than a hundred dollar watch, you wanted Grete. She made no decisions, but she sure enough ran the place, and to their credit her bosses knew it. After seven years they gave her a small piece of the outfit just to make sure she wouldn't think of moving on. Now and then the work took her north to Laramie or Cheyenne, or south as far off as Santa Fe or even Phoenix.

One afternoon at Moira's Coffee Shoppe, fellow name of Claude Richey was feeling mean. Eight months before, Richey's old lady, Lucille, had wandered off for six weeks. She'd come back sudden as she left, suitcase in her hand. Under the kitchen table light where he'd drunk a lot of lonesome beer and he'd fed their three kids stack after stack of pancakes, all he knew to cook, Richey likely thought of the hell he wanted to give her, but he couldn't do it. Took her back without a word. Took her back for fear she'd leave again.

Richey said to Aaron, "You don't worry about your wife when she's away?"

Aaron scooped Moira's apple pie into his mouth. All that sweetness pleased him, and that pumpkin smile broke across his face.

"You don't know a damn thing about wimmen, Aaron, you know that?"

Aaron scratched his head. He really thought about it, grinned, and said, "You know, I doubt that I do."

But Richey was a dog with a rag doll in its teeth. "Don't you ever think about it? Don't it ever worry you in the night?"

Aaron wiped his lip, scratched his jaw, and said he didn't see how Grete might do anything in Laramie for three days that she couldn't do during lunch in Denver. "No point in worrying what you can't help," he said and drank his milk.

"Damn fool."

We told Richey to shut up, the man had answered his question, and Richey shook his head in sorry disbelief or maybe what was envy.

Past few years, Aaron has had his own business. *Reliable Shuttle.* Grete set that up. Aaron humped a van from town to the Denver airport carting businessmen. Snow, ice, wind, Aaron Pendergrast picked up and delivered. Never had an accident. Stayed on the right and steered clear of trouble.

As far as Aaron was concerned, the best thing about his work was it gave him time with Jamie. He was home all mid-day. Grete was a natural woman, but busy, so Aaron had pretty much raised the kid, cooking, cleaning, going to the PTA and the like. We called him a housewife, and he'd laugh and say, "That's about right, boys, and I love it." You can't get the goat of a happy man by reminding him just what he is happiest about.

Ten, Jamie was old enough to know a world bigger than her backyard. Hormones still asleep, she wasn't prone to the craziness that takes us all at thirteen or thereabouts. She'd tear through the streets coming home from school on her bicycle, a pretty pink thing her Daddy had painted and polished, black hair swirling around her, candy-red color in her cheeks like her mother's, legs pumping, her mouth open in a laugh. Jamie had no special toys, the best stereo, or some such, but the pack of girls she traveled with just naturally went to the Pendergrast place to do their homework, giggle about boys, sprawl on the carpet and be silly while experimenting with lip gloss and nail polish. Aaron being there most of the time, you see, the house was safe, comfortable, and the truth of it was that a father will indulge his little girl and her friends where a mother will feel it is important to prepare them for the grief and hard times to come.

So many kids popped in and out of the Pendergrast place, it was difficult to pick any one out, but Aaron noticed Enid. There was her name, and these days when every female child has a name that ends with "A" or is named for a flower, just having a basic handle like "Enid" is a distinction. She never gushed or shrieked, but Enid took in the world through her heavy pink-tinged glasses like a judge contemplating a repeat felon. Leaner, taller, baby-fat gone, not yet a woman, she was just a straw-blonde stick of a girl with pale pursed lips, hollow cheeks, and a way of talking that Aaron guessed meant her people were from maybe the deep South. Enid didn't say much, but when she spoke the other girls took what she said as final. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to know Michael J. Fox?" one of them would moon, and the others would giggle or sigh with that faint pre-pubescent longing that doesn't yet know its own source. But then Enid might say, "He's really older than he looks, you know. Probably not that much fun," and the other girls became subdued.

One early spring afternoon the *Reliable Shuttle* dropped its last passenger at the Best Western and Aaron headed home. Aaron was whistling, and maybe as the rest of us will do, when he got out of the van in his driveway he paused a moment and looked up to the Rockies in the west. You can live here all your life and see the Rockies every day, but the man whose soul isn't now and then lifted by the sight of the snow-covered mountains against a blue spring sky has no soul at all. He stepped around the pile of bicycles, up the three concrete stairs to the kitchen door, and into the house.

"Jamie?"

She didn't answer, but galloped up the stairs from the half-finished basement, bolted into the kitchen where her father already sat unlacing his boots at the table Grete insisted on calling the breakfast nook, and threw her arms around his neck. His child always smelled of shampoo, and when she played hard, as she had been doing downstairs, that odor mixed with the stale smell of perspiration at her scalp. He loved it. Lips smacked a kiss at his cheek, and he patted her bony behind as she ran back to the basement door. He noticed her hips were widening.

The thoughts of a happy man eddied through his mind like mist. He ought to finish the tongue-and-groove pine paneling in the basement and maybe start planning a drop ceiling, he had put off trimming the edge of the kitchen door for too long, Grete wanted to plant a line of rose bushes in the backyard and he could surprise her with that before she came back from Laramie tomorrow, he ought to re-surface the driveway because the freeze-and-thaw this winter past had done its work. These half-thoughts were the pleasant haze of responsibilities within which a happy man will live.

Jamie said from the door, "Can Enid stay for dinner?" and because she charged down the stairs before he could answer, he had to shout, "Sure, but call her mother first."

Aaron popped a beer and read from back to front *The Denver Post.* He was unaware of that big grin spreading across his face. One by one Jamie's friends left the house, each time the screen door shut, banging like a gunshot.

Beer always made him feel nicely fuzzy. Spaghetti? Or a can of soup and let the two kids make sandwiches of cold cuts? He could let the children decide. That was easiest.

"Hello, Mr. Pendergrast."

What was it about the child? Wheels turned within wheels within wheels in that little head, he knew. Enid was somber, probably smart. The pink sweater she wore was too large for her, unraveling at the elbow. If she'd extended her hand to shake, he'd not have been surprised, but she stood with her hands behind her back, a private at parade rest, her thick glasses magnifying her eyes.

"You call your mother yet? It's getting late."

"Whoops," his daughter giggled.

"I'll do that now," Enid said and nodded.

The two girls went to the telephone in the hallway just outside the kitchen. Aaron turned another page, found the business reports, and flipped past them. Jamie dialed the telephone, and he thought that odd. He heard her talking to Enid's mother—he supposed it was her mother—and he heard his daughter relaying the conversation to Enid. Well, kids were strange and would not always find the direct way. Her mother didn't know if she could stay. Call back in half an hour.

They returned to him. Jamie started to tell Aaron what he already knew and he waved a hand at her. "I heard," he said and glanced at the wall clock. How *much* should he prepare? The woman's indecision was an inconvenience, but not serious. What could be going on at Enid's house that a half an hour could make a difference? "You'll just have to call back."

"My mother is having trouble," Enid said.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"All the time."

Aaron watched his daughter watch her friend. Jamie was puzzled. She asked the question Aaron had avoided.

"What kind of trouble?"

"Her boyfriend, Frank." Enid pulled at her sweater's unraveling thread. "She always has trouble with Frank. Can I have a cookie while we wait to call?"

"Help yourself. You know where they are," he said and smiled, but got no smile in return. Did Enid ever smile?

He watched her eat one Vienna Finger and jam three more in her jeans pocket where they had to be crushed to crumbs. The two kids went back to the livingroom. Finally at the paper's front end, Aaron tried making sense of the national news. The kids whispered, but Aaron could make no sense of what they said, either. Truth was, he didn't care to. He wished Grete were home. Grete was better at these things. Grete knew the words.

Without thinking, he went to the hall and grabbed at the telephone. He dialed the number of Grete's hotel in Laramie, his large fingers clumsy on the phone. It was 5:30. The switchboard girl put him through. He listened to the phone in Grete's room ring four, five, six, seven times; he was grateful when Grete finally picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Hi."

"Aaron? Is that you, Aaron?" Grete seemed breathless. The connection was bad, but he thought he heard a radio playing in the background. "Where are you?"

"Well, I'm home. Where else would I be? Are you busy? Were you in the shower?"

"Hold on a sec." Her hand must have covered the phone. He could hear only the static of the bad connection. When she came back on the line the radio had been silenced. "A meeting. I'm in a meeting. Right through dinner. Could you make it fast, Aaron? Can I call you back later?"

He tried to think of why he'd telephoned Grete. Their daughter. Another ten-year-old girl. The kid's mother was having trouble with her boyfriend. What could he say? It made no sense. He was just unsettled. "I just wanted to hear your voice. We miss you," he said. There was a longish pause. Had she heard him? He shouted into the line, forcing his voice the long distance, "We miss you."

"I miss you," his wife said, faint and far away as a night whisper under the crackle and pop of telephone static.

"I guess you're real busy, huh? I'm sorry, Grete."

"It's a meeting, Aaron. It's my job."

He apologized again and they said a hurried good-bye. He retreated to the kitchen, sat at the table and folded his hands. He was lucky to have Grete, a woman who worked that hard, right up through dinner time, so busy she had not thought to say hello to their daughter. Aaron Pendergrast was a happy man, so he could see just how hard it was for his wife to be away from her child and how she would not want to talk to her right then in front of the people she worked with. He'd been wrong to call; what must the people she worked with think of him, her husband that drove a van and called just to hear her voice? Aaron felt sheepish. He'd make it up to her somehow. The rosebushes. First thing in the morning, he'd get rosebushes.

Jamie appeared at the door. "Can Enid sleep here tonight?"

"It's a school night."

"She can wear my clothes tomorrow and she has all of her books. Can she, Daddy?"

"Well, if her mother . . ."

"Thanks, Dad."

He reopened the newspaper. Down in Denver they were experiencing a crime wave. Assaults were up. Rapes. Burglaries. Murders were down, though. He quickly turned the page and went again to the comics. Garfield was tripping up Odie, and that dog always made him smile.

■

The two girls rejoined him, sat beside each other across the table in the breakfast nook. Strong sunlight penetrating the curtain lace fired the room, making Enid look more blonde and his own daughter look more dark. They were a paired set, like those two magnetic Scotty dogs that came in a cellophane envelope from a vending machine. Enid squinted up at the clock, then elbowed his daughter, who burst into speech.

"Enid's Dad doesn't live with them."

"Uh-huh." Aaron had to close the paper. He couldn't help himself and had to ask, "Where is he?"

"Penitentiary," Enid said. "He didn't do it, but they say he did."

"What was that?"

"Embezzle. He's been there four years. Momma got the divorce two years ago. I used to write to him."

"That's hard."

"Frank lives with my mother. They fight. He has two children, but only Rachel lives with us. Rachel is sixteen. Rachel is why they fight."

The kid was perfectly controlled. She might have been reciting multiplication tables, except that she was crying. When Jamie cried at some disappointment, all of her cried. Face all puffed, she'd gasp, nose running, she'd make her racket, and in a few minutes it was done, finished and forgot. But not this kid, no sir. It was eerie how Enid cried. Only her eyes betrayed her. They went red, they brimmed, and then like bad plumbing overflowed. Her motionless hands remained folded on the table. Aaron patted her hands. He had to do something. Enid nodded.

But Jamie was smiling. What could she know about real trouble? His daughter was blessed with that naive faith possible for a happy child. It was why she'd brought her friend in to him. He knew that. Why should any kid have a life like Enid's? He wanted for his daughter's sake to say something, be able to do something, but for that matter, what did Aaron know about trouble? He knew only a bit more than Jamie knew, and that was to steer clear.

"Maybe you should call now," he suggested.

Jamie went to the telephone. Enid's serious eyes so large in their frames held him.

"She wants to talk to Enid," Jamie returned to tell them.

Enid's shoulders sagged and her eyes reddened more as she hauled herself to the telephone.

Aaron sat a second, and then like the times you drove past an auto collision and even though you didn't want to you turned your head and looked, he followed them to the hallway. Enid's face was streaked. She sniffed. A shock of her blonde hair fell over her eyes that she pushed away. She held the receiver close to her face. His daughter was still all right, though. Something was happening, he could tell she knew that, but nothing could happen that was so bad Daddy couldn't fix it. Enid carefully replaced the receiver in its cradle.

"I have to go home. Can you drive me? My mother wants to talk to you."

"To me? What does she want to talk to me about?"

Enid shrugged. Her lower lip trembled. It was getting late. He would have to drive the kid, her bicycle in the back of the van. But he wouldn't talk to the woman. He would drop Enid off, wherever it was she lived, unload the bicycle, and he and Jamie would go straight home, fill the kitchen with the warm mist of boiling water and the aroma of spaghetti sauce. It would be all right.

Enid gave perfect directions, sending the van across the railroad tracks that ran straight north-south through the town. The two kids shared the front seat beside him. The Rockies cast their shadows over the plain. Enid wiped her nose on her sweater sleeve. At the limit of his vision he saw Jamie's face begin to crumble, her automatic certainty in the goodness of things diminished now that she was beyond the warmth and light of her father's kitchen. Grief was a contagion. Aaron jolted the van over the silent policeman of the apartment complex.

"Building 'D,'" Enid said.

They stopped on a roadside apron of brown dust. Quick as he was able, Aaron rushed around to the back of the van, but the woman must have been waiting at her door. Before he had a chance to wrestle Enid's bicycle from the van, she was beside him.

"I need her here tonight," Enid's mother said. "The son-of-a-bitch. I need Enid here. I'm outnumbered. You understand how it is? Come here, Enid. Stand by me, darling."

"We have to be getting back."

"That bastard." Her arm curled around Enid's neck and her thin hand rested on her daughter's narrow chest. "It not him, though. It's not. If he'd talk to his kid, do something with the little slut, we'd be all right. Isn't that so, honey? Can I tell you what happened yesterday? I get home and right there on the livingroom floor the kid is going at it with this guy. Right there on my floor, I swear. Now is that right? Next thing she'll be bringing niggers into my house. And dope. There's dope, too. I can't say nothing to her. I'm not her mother, thank God. It's not my place, is it? So today I had it out with him. I said to Frank his daughter was too damned loose and there was no way in God's creation I had to put up with this bullshit. You know what I'm talking about."

Jamie moved closer to him, pressed against his leg. He tried to smile. Enid's mother shifted her weight and pulled a crushed pack of cigarettes from her pocket. She lit one with the burning stub of another. The two ends of the cigarettes seemed to Aaron to kiss. The woman's neck was strained and taut, the skin tight.

"Enid could stay with us for a while if you . . ."

"No. No. I need her here. She's my girl, you see. If her father wasn't so damned stupid I'd have what I need, but he was more stupid than a man needs to be and so Enid here is my only support. You understand these things, right? People like us know the score. It's just one damn thing after another. I just wanted to tell you so you wouldn't think I was some crazy woman or something. That girl has got to move out. That's the long and short of it. The guy had a tattoo and I am too much of a lady to tell you where. But I am here to tell you, it was a tattoo of a skull. A damned skull. Now, that's proof, ain't it? Ain't that proof?" She tapped her foot. "You're from around here, aren't you?" she said suddenly.

"All my life." His hand, he realized was about his daughter in the identical way the woman's was about Enid. He wanted to shield his daughter's eyes as he'd done when she was little and was frightened by the witch in "The Wizard of Oz," just for the moment hold the horror invisible.

"We have to get home."

He didn't wait to hear what she said, but boosted Jamie up through the rear doors of the van and then banged the doors shut, pulling once at the handle to be sure the doors were locked. Then he brushed by the woman and her child, and though it was now dark he could see Enid's eyes on him, as though by some trick the lenses of her thick pink glasses were able still to hold a glint of light. He started the engine, and the woman was rapping on his window, hitting the glass with what must have once been her wedding ring, though now it was on her right hand.

The woman's lips formed the words "Thank you." Beside her, Enid stared up at him. Aaron was in a lifeboat, the child was sinking in deep water.

He slammed the van into gear and the wheels spun, then caught. Aaron turned on the radio—he wanted sound—but Jamie turned it off. He looked at her. His daughter huddled small against the passenger door, her face reflecting the amber and green lights of the dashboard. As though she were cold she hugged her knees, and as the van jolted through the streets, her head bumped the glass of the window. She sucked her lower lip into her mouth.

"What is it?" Aaron said, hoping in some way his voice would help.

"It's so hard for her," Jamie said. "It's so hard. It's not fair."

He could think of nothing to say. When he reached to pat Jamie's leg, she shied away from him.

He fed Jamie the cold cuts. They ate in silence, and then watched some television the same way. Jamie was put to sleep at the usual time, and she clung a touch harder than usual to her father's neck when he bent to kiss her. He had to push her hands away. "Enough of that," he said and with his finger touched the soft black hair from over her eyes. As he closed the door to her room he wondered what he had meant.

Aaron rested alone in the livingroom. The day wouldn't sit right. The kid, that damned kid Enid, what had she done to deserve what she was getting? How was that possible? Jamie was calling to him. "Daddy." Again and again. "Daddy." He pretended he didn't hear. If he went to her, he did not know what he could say. Not knowing made him angry. Soon enough, she was quiet, maybe asleep. And soon enough, all of her would awaken.

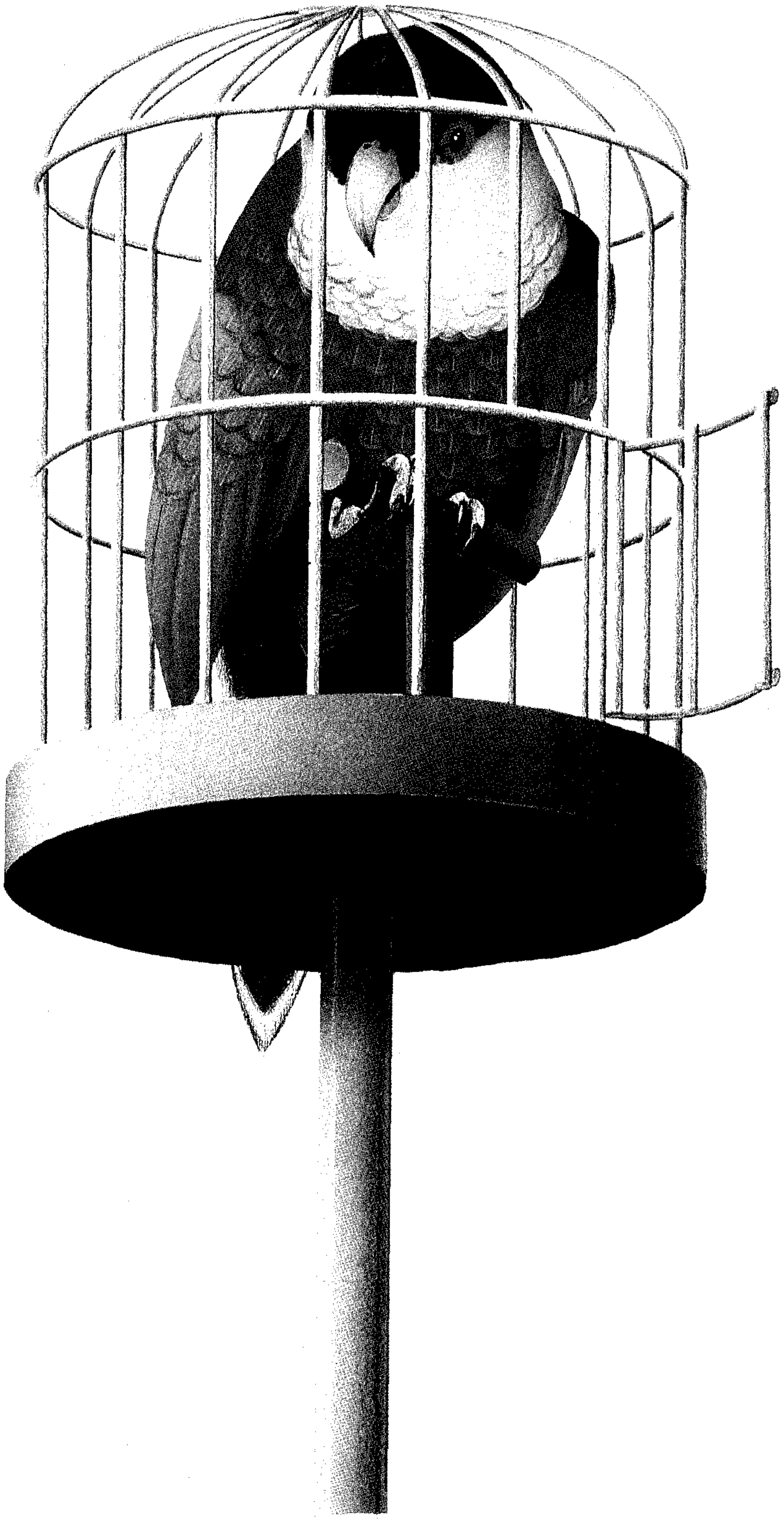
He tried not to think, but he kept coming around back to that woman and child at dusk. He'd had to leave the kid there. There was nothing he could have done. Nothing at all. Damn! And there was nothing he could have said to Jamie. He knew no words. He drank a beer, hoping alcohol might dull the edge, return him to that comfortable mist of half-thought, but his mind remained too sharp, too focused. Enid's eyes had been so damned large! The kid could see too much. And her mother. The woman so thin her jeans rode on her hips and you could see the line of her bones. She'd flicked the cigarette ash two, three, four times before she puffed on it, and she held the cigarette like a man, between her thumb and forefinger. *People like us,* she'd said, *People like us.* What did that mean? The longer he pondered on it, the less sense it made, dim and uncertain as oncoming headlights on a foggy night.

So when the next morning before breakfast we saw Aaron kneeling in his garden firming the damp earth about the roots of the rosebush he'd planted, we were unsurprised. Like the rest of us hereabouts, he understood what was important. You can see why we liked Aaron Pendergrast. We knew him. Aaron Pendergrast was a happy man, and how many men can you say that about? ☐

DANIEL LUSK

BREAD AND WATER

This swan below the bridge
is too arrogant for bread crumbs,
but never raped a woman or begot a child
except maybe by trick of light he fathered
the china-faced doll old Ida
pushes in her buggy past the drugstore,
past the fish market with its river smell
that follows her home, wherever home is.
The literature of rivers is more
than centuries of allusion sweeping over our heads.
It is the stones that appear like wise men
in their proper season and for no
apparent reason thrust up their heads
and shake the arguments of rain from their beards.
This is the way the croziers of cinnamon ferns
arise next to the wall on that one surprising day
that makes the heart skip
in January. After heavy rain
the Monongahela leaves its banks under the mist
of the Cumberland Valley to go like a missionary
among the trailer houses of the poor,
a road nobody planned. And boys in Iowa
still crawl out on the shoulder
of the dam at Cedar Falls to worship carp,
rolling white bread into sticky balls
that carry all their wonder down to lie
among deep creases of the river,
wide-eyed with the ancients.



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THE PASSION OF MARISOL

Shelley Costa

Charles Street in Greenwich Village has, I think, its own set of codes and ordinances. A tree must agree to be neat, a dog can be no larger than a schnauzer, a shop must never draw attention to itself, and a resident must be capable of wearing soft leather in 100° weather. Charles Street: in all things tasteful, in no things human. On the door of one of the largest brownstones is a brass plaque—Dramatis Personae, it reads, the masks of comedy and tragedy alongside, small and raised—identifying it as an acting studio. Outside, obedient to the codes of Charles Street. Inside, a place of riot, pretense, and hope.

It was there I met Marisol, on the day of the audition. "Prepare two pieces," the letter said, "one classical, one modern, of no more than twenty minutes' duration. Wear black." It was a room, that August day, filled with hush: dark and unremarkable, windowless, overhead from a large duct the E-flat sound of cool air on aluminum. The faculty judges sat together in the back, a silent tribunal, sharp-eyed and impassive: removed from August, removed from Charles Street, removed even from the ashes, stubs, shredded cups, chewed nails, nervous coughs and shifty eyes of the rest of us. I looked around. Black t-shirts, black leotards, black slacks. We looked like a fugitive mime troupe. I pulled on my ballet slippers.

On the platform at the front of the room, setting Stella straight about the loss of Belle Reve, was someone lovely, stately, her hair red and twisted as kelp. I wondered if they would disqualify her. The dress she wore was gray. Unlike the shrill, hopeless Blanches I had seen, hers was poised and intelligent. But so, for that matter, was her Medea. Marisol, I would learn, was an elusive actress. She never "became" characters, trapping them between steel jaws like the rest of us. Instead, they became Marisol: they spoke through her, moved with her. She let them inhabit her for a while and ransack the stores of her feeling. Then, like a headmistress, she sent them out into the world. Improved.

"Very good," I whispered when she sat down next to me.

She smiled. "Good enough, I suppose. I think they'll take me. I find I always do well where I care least."

"Don't you want to study here?"

"Perry," someone called. "Francesca Perry."

"Is that you?" she asked, and I nodded. "Do you want to study here?"

"Yes."

"Then so do I."

We took an apartment together and started classes. It was hard to believe that Madame Noémie Durant had ever been a mademoiselle, an actress (famous on the Continent and in England), a friend of Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, or a tenant of any place other than the easy chair in studio four. In all the months we studied with her, Madame was there, heaped in her chair before we came in and there after we left. She was shapeless and immovable, never restless through all the hours of scene study, her small feet primly crossed in their black laced shoes.

She never demonstrated. There was nothing to demonstrate. Presumably, they assigned her the best, those administrators in the front office. Presumably, every class was "avancée." Rather than disappoint her, we rehearsed together outside class, coached and supported each other, and presented Madame only with finished scenes. Still there was her anger, her disgust, her noncommittal pleasure at our work. We learned to watch her pencil. When Madame placed it quietly in front of her, she was pleased. When she tapped her glasses with it, she was impatient. And when she was angry, she twisted and pressed it. What we couldn't account for were the one or two pencils shoved like ornamental hairpins into her neat chignon and forgotten.

Whenever she suspected the front office had made some mistake in the selection and assignment of students, Madame gave us her speech on discipline. It was her chance at bad metaphor. You must be, class, like la tour Eiffel, wide at the base with the discipline of craft, soaring to a point of perfection. You must be like the Verrazzano Bridge, passing like steel over your difficulties. You must be like a charioteer, an oak tree, a Jesuit, the Big Dipper. But I worked for her—all the time harder, later, more ruthless, through flu, transit strike, love affairs and hospital tests for ulcers. I was a Jesuit, an oak, a constellation. But was I an actress?

The lectures were wasted on Marisol. She learned her lines, went to class, and performed. That was it. The rest of us scanned the bulletin boards for audition notices, spent our free time in the darkened balconies on, off, and off-off Broadway, outread each other on the drama reviews, and pleaded for some time with Maggie Smith, Anthony Hopkins, anyone at all who came around and had a rep.

Not Marisol.

Finally, I asked her one morning. I stood in the doorway of her room. Marisol sat at her dressing table, her arms thin in her loose kimono. She put down her brush and started to work on her hair. I knew she could twist, knot, braid or otherwise subdue it in a matter of moments, with just a few pins—her fingers quick and independent, her face blank. She looked up and saw me. "Here, Ches," she said. "Make a French braid for me."

"I don't know how."

"I'll tell you."

Three great strands, pulling in, pulling in as I go, seamless joints of hair. First one rein over, then another, each to the middle, its length sinking and disappearing (pull in, she reminded me, the way I do, you've seen me do it, pull in). Yes, Marisol, I've seen you do it, I thought, my fingers closing like a dying insect—why am I doing it, then, tell me, when your hands are surer, faster, than mine? Need is a dark, corner thing of cobweb and recess. "What are your plans?" I asked her, my slow fingers pulling in, pulling in.

"Plans?" Stumped. As though I'd asked her to define *quark* or locate Yemen on the globe. "I have no plans." We were silent, my fingers working. "I do have a plan," Marisol announced suddenly. "I plan to marry Simón."

"I know. When?"

"Sometime this spring," she said. "Or summer. Who knows? It doesn't matter. Sometime soon." Plans, Marisol said, were nice. Some people like them, she supposed, found them good to have. She might as well have been talking about a breed of dog. Her mother and father never made plans and they were quite happy, wherever they were. The Daleys, apparently, kept misplacing each other. Like a scrap of paper with a telephone number. Her mother, Marisol thought, was still in Kenya teaching rappelling or primate behavior to rich young Americans. And her father was traveling with a small Rumanian circus, doing a photo spread for *Life*. They never planned on being separated, the three of them. It just worked out that way. Not since she'd been a little girl had they all lived together in the apartment in Buenos Aires. They're careless, she shrugged, but quite fun, really. ("Done," I said, smoothing the chain she wanted from the three great strands of her hair.) So, she said, she has no plans, no home, no history, even. She shook her head. "All I have is this—" her fingertips pulled it together out of the air, "this feeling." She shuddered.

"What? Love?"

"Call it what you like. Yes. At least that. The rest I don't recognize."

I saw his picture on her dresser. "You mean for him."

"And you, now." She reached over her shoulder, slid her fingers through mine, and pressed my hand against her. I flattened into a frieze, for a moment all ribs and throb. No. Not love. Not this passion simply stated. Something was expected. Some acknowledgement, at least. Could I manage one? No, it was too much, too much. I remembered a little neighbor girl—what was her name?—we were nine. A tiny cut to my finger, a tiny cut to hers, rubbing our wounds together and swearing ourselves blood sisters. Unto death. But distance, boredom and dislike came first. And now nothing was left—not a scar, not even a name. Blood passion and stern promises. They never change, really, as we grow up. All we lack now is the knife.

I seized his picture. It was, as it turned out, a plain black and white photo. Nicely blurred. It showed a man looking out over an expanse of pale, billowing land. One arm rested along the back of a white, muscular horse, the reins loose in his other hand. The great *estanciero* himself. It was signed "*con muchisimo amor*." Real or reckless, this love? I couldn't make it out. But he had some life for me, this *esposo* of hers, suddenly here in this room. Like a bubble or whining steam in the prehistoric slime. A cell. Then, two. But I had no use for my sentimental Argentine friend and her gaucho lover. There was an embarrassment of love between them. Letters tied unbelievably with pink ribbon, his picture enshrined on her dresser, a sprig of hyacinth before it. Where did she find it at this time of year? And on his part, who knows, down there among the stucco and Herefords. A splash of her hair under his pillow, perhaps, hidden like a bloodstain. Love, it seems, makes people trite.

"Very nice," I said, handing it back to her.

She knew. Worse, she forgave.

Madame was twisting her pencil. "How very interesting, Miss Perry. A French accent. Shaw's Joan with an accent français. It's so obvious, how could it have been overlooked? Tell me," she looked at me, "where did you study previously? Berlitz?" I must have looked pathetic, dragging away my cardboard sword. Like a dead limb. No good to me. "Runs himself through," the stage direction always reads. It seemed so good and clear. The most I could get would be a paper burn. So this was it, my acting—just a shabby dependence on accents and idiotic props. I should be able to sit in a chair wearing a bathrobe and shower cap and deliver up a Joan fit for burning. ("Who's next?" Madame said as I let myself out of the room.) Christ. My life was ragged and murky. Old coffee sludge, this life of mine. What would I do without the stage? What would I do? Get an MBA from NYU. Go to work for IBM. Could I do it? Stickpins and memo pads. Talking acronyms to the Big Boys and nonsense to Xerox repairmen. Saying things like "deficit" and "operationalize." Charting my life on my Week-At-A-Glance. Oh, God. I was tired. And crying. Limp and defeated on the old sofa in the back hall. Just corridors away from the place of shame. Someone crouched nearby, knees cracking, hands folded into a great coarse knob. I looked. It was Dan, all slow, heavy bones and dental arrogance. A witness to my disgrace. He looked at me, at my shoulders jolting with sobs, and brushed my hair out from under my collar. "Perdidos, Ches—" Marisol had said that morning when she told me Simón was coming— "those are the ones you like, the soft, sweet men who agonize over their jobs and their manhood."

"And Simón's not one of them, I take it?"

"Simón is—complete." Some day, I thought, looking at Dan, some day I will take more interest in these distinctions. Lost, sweet, damned, complete: *perdidos*. Speak to me of simpler needs, Marisol, and when you can push my hair out from under my collar with the gentle backs of your fingers, I'll listen.

He murdered my husband, I was thinking, this bloody, repulsive, wicked, miserable, deformed man. Gloucester. Hard, skinned, unlovely—my face became loose with pain and hatred. Here at my feet, my husband, cold and still. Here at my side, his killer, smooth and comforting—

A door opened. There was a man, backlit by the light from the corridor. Hiss, clang, the radiator in the corner. Feet shuffling. Marisol's head turning to the door. My bladder. Gloucester's voice—no, Dan's, really. Madame's ruler, rap, rap, rap, "You're drifting, Miss Perry.

■

Are you Lady Anne? Or are you waiting for a bus on Flatbush?"

"Sorry."

Marisol was motioning wildly to the man at the back. He raised a hand. It moved briefly, left, right. Go, the Mass is ended. Peace be with you. So here he is. Here he is. Arms folded, leaning against the closet at the back of the studio. No coat in winter? How could she love a man who doesn't wear an overcoat in January? Silly, smug, freezing bastard. The door had closed, the shadows back. Marisol was twisted in her seat, pointing, pointing to me, that's Ches, she seemed to be saying, Ches, there she is. He nodded once, smiling. I felt hot. She was straining, leaping without moving a leg.

"Arise, dissembler—" I managed. "—though I wish thy death, I will not be thy executioner." Drifting. Drifted. Sounding no different than ever. Centuries, miles, feelings away from Lady Anne then, but no different. No different. That was theater, wasn't it? I knew it then. Just as I knew his eyes were light. Just as I knew she was bruising herself. Five minutes ago I was the widow Anne—my voice, my hands, my eyes all hers. Now I was the widow Anne—but the hands were Simón's, the eyes Marisol's, the voice only mine. Playacting. It was a job, after all, like any other. Dan's face nearby: "What the hell's going on? Are you out of your mind?" It was wonderful. A wrinkle, a widening, a vein that was not Gloucester. ("Miss Daley," Madame said quietly, "you are excused"—her chair scraped, her hair a flow of neon in the dark, and she was in his arms, a faceless, hunched thing they made.)

Reckless with pain. "I would I knew thy heart," my own voice pierced and trembling. Next to Dan, not stage right like we rehearsed, but next to him, on him, a mosquito's wings, a cat's whiskers. It was new. His hand on my waist. Unplanned. Certain. "Say, then, my peace is made." Our faces together, voices quiet, urgent. Madame's pencil slid from her hand, a tiny smack on the floor. I felt them there at the rear, apart, watching the stage. I never felt stronger. I had them. All. "—and much it joys me, too, to see you are become so penitent." I looked into Gloucester's face, so hard I could count the pores, the creases, the pearls of sweat. But whose face was it? Didn't know. Too close to say. Some things we know in that other place of feeling, behind the navel. The first mind. It wasn't Dan's face I was seeing, but hers. Or his.

At dinner later, Dan talked—the same old observations about intuition and five kinds of "craft" that only an actor could think no one's ever made before. Simón listened, pushing breadcrumbs into a neat half moon with his third finger. "—had me worried for a while there, lass." Dan managed to look at me through his eyebrows. Lass. Who was he doing? Finney? O'Toole? Finney doing O'Toole? The others were looking at me. If I could hold out for two seconds, Dan would leap into the conversational breach. One. Two. "Of course—" he continued. As he talked, he gestured with his dinner roll. Who now? For a moment, his arm was still. Hamlet, last November, the gravedigger's scene. Alas, poor roll. He buttered it distractedly, including his thumb and part of his cuff. This was theater. This was America. Dan could wipe his face with his steak and Marisol wouldn't notice, she was vacant with joy. And Simón (I looked over at him) would be polite, a tolerant hidalgo to the end. I was stunned. A corner of the man's mouth twitched, he blinked twice—controlling a smile—and we made the mistake of looking at each other. My insides were gymnastic with feeling—sudden liking, shame, hatred, sorrow.

I moved closer to Dan. I knew him. All of him. The gang: Hamlet, Gloucester, Stanley Kowalski, Biff, Brick, Hjelmar, Dunois, Macmurphy, the Ragpicker. All the rest. We become bionic with all our new parts. Little by little they replace the old, infirm, imperfect, mortal pieces of us. Replaced. Improved. We no longer just lift our heads. We lift our heads like Oberon. We laugh like Falstaff. We're steady like Becket, furious like Henry II, undone like Othello. All these people. Peep out of us like children at the orphanage windows.

Dan licked his thumb. We rehearsed every night for three weeks, his place, my place, places in between. Sitting, standing, lying down, in the shower, washing dishes, at the laundromat, under the sign "Stand Clear of Tracks," while water drip, drip, dripped somewhere in the dark and quiet tunnel. Mostly as the scene ended Lady Anne would be pulling off her jeans ("Well, well, put up your sword") and Gloucester, pulling his sweater over his head (muffled: "Then may I live in hope?") Sometimes it felt erotic, running the lines for all we were worth, our hands like quiet valets, putting aside our clothes. Sometimes it felt mundane. Erotic. Mundane. Already too many things. I was tired of everything being more than one thing.

We stood under the awning outside the restaurant. "More snow, eh?" Dan said, zipping up his Army surplus jacket. "Can't come back. Sorry." He held up a rolled copy of a new script. I nodded as though I knew what he was working on, my eyes knowing as a shrink's. "Mm," I said. So tired of company. Nowhere my own. Back now in a cab with the enamoratos. Dan was loping off down the block, waving back at us like he was signaling a rescue plane. Still talking, I think, his breath white spirals fading into the night. Stop, I thought. Wait, I thought. Take me along. I have no money for a hotel. Don't want to go home. And the molded plastic chairs at Penn Station would hurt my back. Wait. I watched the white soles of his Nikes get small, smaller, lost out there in the falling snow.

"Ches?" They were waiting. I got into the cab, slid over to the far window. Marisol sat between us. "Better?" she said to Simón, the collar of his tweed jacket pulled up straight to his jaw. He was blowing into his cupped hands. My own were flexing stiffly inside my pockets. I liked him better for being cold. "Donkeys," she said, the only one of us with gloves. "Here." Gathering what hands she could, Marisol kissed them, held them in her lap. Wool and flesh. A hideous, twining clump. Laocoön in a cab, driving down Fifth. She pressed us into her lap. As we rode, her gloves felt cooler, his fingers warmer. I looked out at the snow, listened to the wipers, the meter, the driver whistling an indefinable tune between his teeth. I squinted into the front. Luis Ramirez, it said beside the photo next to the meter. Numbers and rules. The meter.

The wipers. Beside me Marisol was asleep, her head on his shoulder.

"We're dropping you off," he said, freeing his hand.

"Oh."

"We're staying at my hotel."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"That's not so."

I looked at him. No longer a blurred picture on her dresser, safe (him or me?) down there wherever the hell in Argentina with Nazis in hiding and revolutionaries in evidence and Acts of God always somewhere between the two. What the hell was he doing here in Luis Ramirez' cab, not two feet away from my courteous lies? "Partly," I said, steady as—all right, damn it—Becket.

We stood a few feet apart at the rail, watching the skaters. Graceful couples in a slow and patient glide, dashers and clingers, wobblers, racers, sitters. The sky over Rockefeller Plaza was gray and heavy. For now, at least, there was no new snow. Near the center of the ice was Marisol in a fleecy black sweatsuit. As she skated backwards, her hair waved in front of her, an arm lazily curling over her head to pull it back. She tried an axel, fell out of it, and then did a sit spin. Her face never changed. She did whatever occurred—no preparation, no response. A camel or toe loop would simply emerge as she skated, slight and incidental, like a comma or a dash. She acted, skated, lived the same—with a kind of inattention that made her elegant.

"I'll be leaving soon." I said.

"Look at her." The music had changed to a lively mazurka. Her arms overhead, Marisol improvised a quick little step, skated faster than I'd ever seen, then stopped recklessly, her blades scattering ice in sharp white fans. Again, arms high, she danced in place, a crude, jerky step, then raced across the ice. "She's thinking of you," Simón said.

"Or you."

"Both."

He was probably right. A week had passed and last night was the first time they stayed at the apartment. Paella and wine became music and more wine. ("Can't stay," Dan said, pulling on his coat, script between his teeth. "Late rehearsal,"—I wondered whether it was Jeanine or Alma or Katharine with an A like Hepburn—and he was gone.) The candles she'd set like signal fires around the room burned low. Ten, eleven, twelve, who knew the hour? A secret time of night, on a third bottle of a Pinot Noir. When you hear everything through a wall. Like an eavesdropper. Distant. Quiet. He sat on the floor, his back against the couch, one knee raised. And he talked, rotating his glass near a candle, watching the flame seep through the wine: a stain of light. He mentioned the Galapagos, I remember, and sperm whales, an uncle, Arabians, conches, stigmata, and Jung. Between the whales and the uncle, Marisol pulled her sweater over her head, rolled it into a pillow, and lay back on the floor, the clean white camisole cutting straight across her chest. How can you trap the place where red becomes purple before you know it, where yellow becomes green and you never even blinked? Where uncles become horses and sweaters become skin? And horses and skin together are more beautiful than you can say?

They were silent, separate, she slightly curled on her side, he with his head back. I thought of Pompeii, unearthed, and the sleeping human rocks there. But this (it was the wine, the wine) was life. And life was missing something. Not for her, the skirt hitched up like a gypsy's, the three of us here together. But for me. That relentless space wedged in everywhere. Talk, shout, hold, cling, until death spills over you, fires you into sleeping human rocks for all eternity—you're no closer, no closer at all. They were there, those wedges, and nothing—not love, not hate—could move them.

I watched Marisol get to her feet and push a hand through her hair. She kissed the top of my head, her breasts shifting in the camisole, and for a moment I was Simón, making love to her. Then red became purple, she moved, yellow became green, she was gone, and I was Marisol, making love to him. My eyes touched down on him, like an insect, then off. The air hardened like amber. Caught.

"—hate me?" I looked up. His hand stretched around his glass like an octave. I was confused. It was the wine. "You hate me. Why?" he said, and green shrank to yellow.

"I don't." My arms were cold.

"You do."

"I don't know." A whisper. "I don't know why."

"Are you in love with her?"

"No."

"It happens."

"Not to me."

"Would you know it?"

"Yes. Yes, I would know it." I would, wouldn't I, recognize love? Sharp and clear—like the first few lines on an eye chart. E, F, P, T, O, Z. No letter any other letter. E is E. It's E and we know it's E.

"She loves you," he said. Oh, yes, the great passion, the heart on fire. The feeling, the feeling—pulling it out of the air with her fingers like Ophelia in her lunacy. "As much as she loves me," he added.

I looked at him. "How can you think that?" My throat closed up, painful. E was not E. It wasn't even D or F. Where did it go? If I blinked, the tears would roll out. So he shimmered there in front of me, still and unknown, only the wine, the tears, the candlelight making him writhe.

"She told me."

Why? Why would she say that? What does she want? It was my turn. "Do you hate me?" A question I had never in my life asked.

He put down his glass. "No."

No more. I needed sleep. Turned to pull myself up. Weak and slow. Oh, gravity, gravity, are you the name of the struggle? Dissolving muscle and will. Marisol. I name you. White and disappearing. Her—camisole. What did she want? What did she hear? I flung myself into bed. Drifted sightless for a while. Wings, waves, fins friendly and unseen. Then I closed the window and added blankets, kicked them off and opened the window, closed, opened, on, off. Finally my mind a great gray headstone, pressing my head into the pillow. Marking the mortality that suddenly seemed sweet. I slept—dreamless, brainless with wine and grief.

We watched her on the ice. She was moving more slowly, falling more often, drawn to the gentle outside pastures of the ice. "She's tired," Simón said.

"I have to go. There's a matinee."

He nodded. Marisol saw us, smiled and waved. We waved back. She skated an eight, the figure with no end, her legs open, toes out, the ice holding her to the cool purity of the move. He was leaving in the morning. There was, at least, that fact. And the shrill, silent din of the three of us would end. A train whistle at night, strafing the countryside. All clack and clash as the tunnel nears. He was leaving and the trouble would be over. I shivered.

"Goodbye, then, Ches," he said, pulling me close in a quick hug. I felt stiff and sad. Over his shoulder I saw Marisol, distant and wise, crossing her arms over her chest, caught in an endless eight.

Over the spring, it happened, finally. I became good. Not the good of the critics, coaches, public, or new students—I was good the way actors mean good: polished and substantial. A good artist and a professional threat. Late in March, when I did Juliet—fearful, passionate, the sleeping potion in hand ("Romeo, I come, this do I drink to thee")—Alma was crying, Dan was grim with admiration, and Madame had stuck a pencil in her hair. Marisol was absent.

Absent. Absent everywhere. As I sat down, Juliet subsided, taking with her terror and love. Leaving only me, Francesca, baffled and inadequate. Where was she? Where was Marisol? Not in class, not at home. "Marisol?" I closed the apartment door, trembling. I remembered she seemed thinner, quieter, less—just *less*, since he left. I watched it, even commented on it—"You're losing weight." "I suppose so." "What are you thinking?" "Nothing. I'm just tired."—and never really thought about it. "Marisol?" I opened the door to her room. Empty. Her bed was unmade, clothes heaped on the chair, the floor. A saucer filled with cigarette ash and yellow stubs was next to the bed. I turned, tall and innocent, desperate with loss. I had let her down, let her down somehow, hurt her, not been there for her. On her dresser, his photograph, the only thing unchanged in her room. And then. One, two, four, eight, sixteen, the mitosis of evil—oh, yes, the growth, certain and sick, that says, I did it, did it, did it, made her miserable, caused it, knew it, wanted it, all along.

"Ches?"

I woke up later, startled. "Marisol? What is it?" She was sitting near me on the bed, her hair pinned carelessly back, skin so pale it was blue. I sat up. "What time is it?"

"I don't know."

"What's the matter?" It was here. A moment I had to survive, one of her making (one, two, four, the evil thing again saying mine, it was mine). "Bad news from—home?" I stalled. She shook her head. "Then what?"

"I'm so lonely," she said, hands like visors over her eyes, her voice surprised. She said something about the ferry, the smell of fish and brine, out and back, the observation deck at the Empire State, wind and fright, up and down. How she passed the time, alone and moving, all the trips out, all the trips up, without me, without him. Without. I pictured elevators and ferries taking her along, the lovely woman with red hair and redder feeling and no direction. Only cables and rudders sending her up, sending her out. We held each other, convulsed and speechless. Her shoulders were bony, her backbone a sharp, brittle ridge. Marisol. Who was I closer to knowing, in that moment, you or myself? It was the closest I could come, I knew, feeling her mouth twitching in sobs against my neck, her breath light and warm. You ask too much, too much, my cheek moving gently against her hair. Skull to skull. Our shells are all on the inside, below hair, skin, blood, muscle. The final place, inside, the final hardness. We never want, really, to know. We only slide, clumsy and protesting, into self-knowledge. Her fingers stretched out across my shoulders. Terror and love. I remembered Juliet's. No, no, these were—my own. My own. Speak. Speak from them. "Go to Simón," I said, "Go home, Marisol." I let her go, turned to the wall, my knuckles hard against my teeth. Marisol was talking but I no longer heard—she seemed clearer, calmer, but all I saw was the wall, flat, cool and dark. The mattress moved and Marisol was gone. I rubbed my face. Something hurt. I realized I was grinding my teeth so hard I had broken a tooth, and I cried, grateful at last for the strict and honest pain.

What fell, then, between us was a tender formality, a gavotte of the heart. Spacious, measured, deferential. Over the next month, we pleased and thanked, smiled and hugged—a challenging action engaging as few body parts as possible. Forearms and half-faces. What modern women we were, artists in the chiseling away of love. Pretty soon, pretty soon, we'd have it down to fingertips and mere tangents of hair. Marisol planned, packed, sold some of her furniture, gave away books and clothes, wrote to Simón. She was going home.

The early evening, I remember, was warm. I was meeting Marisol at the studio to block the scene Madame had assigned us for our "final"—Act II, Scene I from *Look Back in Anger*. Helena and Alison, two women in love with the same man. Plain talk over coffee cups and wisps of hair. What was wrong with Madame? Not my sort of thing at all, the toad. Late, half-running—there was an after-dinner stillness everywhere. Few cars, few people, only sirens distant, airborne. Where had the city gone? Dinners cooling, dogs scratching to go out, cars idling, abandoned, at stop lights, everyone gone to the sounds of distant sirens, to watch the spectacle. No, not even in New York. Tragedy was strictly a matter of neighborhood: only people living on the same city block had to watch the ladder crank up the side of the building or the stretcher wheel in through a door. Anyone else could just walk by. So where, then, was the city? Huddled in basements, under the black and yellow Fallout Shelter signs (capacity 50), waiting, waiting, waiting for the bomb? "Have you made reservations?" Marisol asked that morning. She was bent at the waist, back brushing her hair. Reservations? I thought. Dinner? Had I forgotten a dinner, or a show? "For what?" Her brush stopped; she stood up. "For the plane," she said, going pale. "The plane ticket." I saw it, then, complete, in a millisecond of horror too fast even to register on my face. The wedding. She expected me to come for the wedding, first. To close up the apartment, give up the final audition for the Stratford company, pay somehow for air fare to Buenos Aires, leave Dan, leave Alma, leave Dan to Alma—leave the city. And for how long, Marisol? For good, wasn't it? A month? A summer? A term? Indefinite. Indefinite plans. An indefinite stay. Waking up—alone, with him, with her, with them, all things sharp, slack, possible—fright cold in my mouth. An Argentine life for me. Terra cotta drying, white tiles warming, dripping water and discreet greenery. Is that what she wants? Is it? The three of us, three of us. The train whistle we were, shrill, coarse, split into a thousand notes as the tunnel nears. I turned away. "Not yet," I said.

Shrill, peaking, persistent—not a train at all, but sirens closer now. No, I was the one who was closer. They were somewhere nearby. Something was happening on Charles Street, near the studio. In the studio. No, near it. In it. Near it. In, in, in. Drawings in black ink somewhere: What Do You See? A beautiful woman or an old hag? What Do You See? Two faces in profile or a chalice? And even as we lock fiercely on one of the images, it erodes and we're left with the other, the second image. Then the first. And again the second. The profiles, the chalice. Until all we see, really, is our own fear in black ink on white paper. And fear is the only discovery we have left. Something was happening in the studio and I was running—I knew it, knew it, as what I saw first gave way miserably to a second, surer knowledge. It wasn't someone else's problem or bad luck or tragedy I was going to be on hand to witness. I thought of those people on the safe borders of front page photographs. An unidentified back, an anonymous hip and arm. A step away from the blessed wilderness outside the frame.

It was fire. All sound and color that had nothing to do with experience because experience is something sharp and conscious. Something that happens in some part of the brain that reflects. Not this. It replaced experience. Smoke was darkening the street, squad cars at reckless angles, wheels up on the curb. Shouts and radio static. The fire darting out of the studio windows, broken, snapping like cellophane. Engines red, flashing lights red, blue, the colors of us, of life, oh, shit. And sirens like arias endless and gay through the darkening street. From somewhere—where? the engines? the street? the air—a sound over all, London in the blitz, Dresden—a harsh and hollow honking—the voice of the world's pain. I shook off a cop, glass, splinters, water, my cheeks twitching from the effort to keep my eyes open any longer, smoke like acid making all colors black.

"Marisol!" Where was the front of the building? I wanted to fling myself at it, pull it apart, til it let her go. "Marisol! Marisol!" Every sound a separate torment. I started to choke. Mar-i-sol. The syllables of despair.

"Miss Perry?" A hand on my arm. "Miss Perry, come away now." I turned. It was—Madame, she was here, outside—we were outside, weren't we?—and she was talking. "Do you hear me? Miss Daley is safe. She got out when the fire first started." Marisol was safe. The studio was burning—soon it would have no floors, no chairs, no platforms, posters, notices. No green horsehair sofa where Dan pulled my hair out from under my collar. No stairs where Marisol, on a lower step, turned, her hand clutching my skirt like a rope in some mute gesture of love. No doorways where he stood that first night, even his shadows lighter than the crevices in my heart. A slippery world it would be, the landmarks gone. But Marisol was safe. What—what does that mean?

"Tea? Whiskey?" Madame turned on a small table lamp.

"Whiskey, please." Weak and shivering. Hands quiet on my legs, the fingers laid out pale and still. Ten little corpses. High in the wall next to me were two windows at street level. Noise, fire, shouts, water—all, all were only partial and harmless. Red metal, black rubber, legs running, flashing but no lights, voices but no sense. Nothing whole. Nothing hurt. I was safe behind her walls, here in a basement home. Old leather, old lace, old walls hidden behind framed glossies and playbills. Only something whole can hurt you, is that it? Not the senseless fragments outside her window. I could sit and watch, not moved, not moving, for days. I could outlast the drama. Reserved. Unspent. The great red trucks would rumble away, the debris would disappear at dawn, the cars would return. And still I would watch, safe as long as I could see it all as patterns of light and color and sound—and not life.

Madame handed me a glass. We stood at the window. One entire squad car, all but the heads of two firemen, part of the studio, the necrotic smell of wet, charred wood stronger here by the window. Greater entireties. I started to shake and downed the whiskey before I could no longer trust my hand. Marisol, I imagined telling her, I thought I had lost you. Marisol, I imagined pressing her into me, filling my spaces with her like some sweet, warm clay, I love you. I started to cry.

Madame stood beside me, her eyes on the street. "You young people," she said softly. "Always so bouleversé by your feelings. So surprised." She shook her head. "So undone." I couldn't watch the street any longer, turned, leaned against the wall. Madame sipped her drink, her eyes erratic as flies on the scene outside. "And," she asked, "do you know why? Because you have no feelings, for the most part, not really. What you have—" she gestured with her glass—"are ideas about feelings. How it changes everything, everything, Miss Perry. Think of the ones who clear the land to make a housing development. Well, the frogs and snakes and praying mantises can no longer live there—but, who even knows? We hardly see them, but rows of houses, yes, those we see. Up go the houses, away go the creatures of the grass and the rocks, back come the insects. Back comes disease. And the people have their houses and their sickness. That," she put down her glass, "is what they call ecology. But this—" two crooked fingers tapped her chest—"this is what I call ecology. And over the years I have watched the little creatures who lived here first, numerous and unseen, vanish. Oh, yes. We don't have love or art—we have couples. We have shows. Our houses, Miss Perry, and our sickness."

*

We stood next to the Sabrett truck at Columbus Circle. "So?" Dan managed to look at me while he poked around in his jeans pocket, two cans of Fanta orange tucked under an arm, hot dogs under his chin. He handed me one. "How was Stratford?" He motioned to the vendor for more sauerkraut. "Brian Bedford there this year?" We ate as we walked, Dan's teeth and tongue busy with stray crumbs, napkins crumpled unused in his hands. Four months, at least, since we'd seen each other. No letters, no changes, drifting together like slack buoys for some modern equivalent of love. At the corner, arms loosely around each other, we ran across the street. Another six blocks we'd be at his place—nothing spoken, nothing questioned. What were the questions, anyhow? Alma, it seemed (who was too possessive—"not at all like you," he said), was sulking in Providence and calling him every other night. Katharine with an A like Hepburn prefers girls ("What a shock that was, I don't mind telling you"). The studio is sharing space with the Berghof people until "the fire thing" is over and the new interior done. Madame expects you soonest, waiting table is a kick ("Good evening, I'm your waiter Dan, how are you folks this evening, can I get you a cocktail?"), word is out there'll be open auditions for the new Peter Shaffer play, any word from Marisol?

I could see the thin blue aerograms in the drawer of my nightstand. A dozen or so since she left late in the spring. All from Marisol—except one, last month, from Simón. *About the wedding* (she wrote in June), *I understand. Stratford sounds perfect, but you'll come soon as you can, won't you, Ches?* The day they were married I opened as Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*, missed a cue, popped a bodice button, and nearly passed out from cramps during the trial scene. *Come soon as you can, I love you, here are three pictures, two from the wedding, one not—how pensive he is, I think—pay no attention to my hard bright smile, I am missing you then, missing you now.* And always, to her, I wrote news of the season, the jokes, the mishaps, the tempers and love affairs (never my own), the productions themselves—*soon*, I'd end, *maybe late in the summer, sometime soon, we'll see, maybe early in the fall, soon, soon.* And there were days—Mondays, mostly, the theater dark, and languid, Canadian time on my hands, that I believed I was being decent. Decent. A decency I could only manage thousands of miles away. Give it time, I thought, although I could never say what "it" was. Give her time, I thought, the letters will become fewer—he is so much, so near. And then I felt some vast longing sudden as a rupture, my body red and spongy. But her letters continued, her handwriting smaller, harder to read, the postage stamps crooked. *I am sick, come soon, Ches, I love you.* And I would write back: hope you're feeling better, see you soon. *You love me, don't you, Ches, I know you do, don't be afraid, you belong to me.* I sent her a clipping—"a talented newcomer," it called me—and attached a brief note, "will write soon. Love to Simón."

She called once, when I was running late for the evening performance, the hotel phone a sudden clamor in my room. "Ches? Ches, are you there? I did it, I got through." Distant and small, more like memory than a human voice. "Talk to me. Tell me how you are."

Her loving imperatives. Talk to me. Tell me. Make a braid. Try this wine. Come with us. Here. Don't be afraid. I remembered them all, her need as strong as arms around my ribs. Only one, "hold me," I never heard. The only one that mattered. All the rest was just conversational love. "Marisol," I said, sad and futile, "Marisol, I can't. I was supposed to be in makeup twenty minutes ago."

"Talk to me first then I'll let you go."

"I'm fine."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Tell me when you're coming."

"I'll have to get back to you."

"Ches, I—"

"I can't hear you."

"I need you. I need to talk to you."

"Call me back. Call me back at the end of the week, all right? I have to go."

"Ches—"

"I have to go."

Instead, she wrote, a letter half in Spanish and half illegible. Too sick to eat, too tired to move, Simón sad, angry, sometimes there, sometimes not. Where? *Enamorata.*

A lover. He had a lover. Is that it? Is it? What else can she mean? I asked Paco, one of the stagehands. "A beloved." A lover? He shrugged. A beloved. Worse. How can anyone be more beloved than Marisol? I cried, pounded my cheeks, it seems, until they swelled. Makeup took longer that night. Liese worked gently around my eyes, dabbing the pancake instead of making her usual swipes. After the show, I wrote, shaking, to Marisol. There were two letters, one unwritten. The one I sent asked her are you sure? are you sure? Reminded her how wonderful, how loving, how etcetera he was. Told her to see a doctor. The one unwritten said I need you, I'll be there soon, I love you both with all my heart. But because I stared into the dark for hours, hearing only the word "both," finally, the walls of my hotel room receding around me, I felt flat and stark to myself for days—and found it easier, at some point, to mail the other, lesser letter, instead.

Please come, he wrote, *she is depressed, refuses help and food. When I come near her, she covers her face, saying it isn't enough. Or she hits me, saying, liar, who is it, tell me. Last night I found her in the bathroom—she'd cut off her hair—put the scissors down and looked at me. "You just don't love me enough," she said, clear, quiet, and correct. We stood there, looking at each other, for a long time, and she saw I couldn't tell her she was wrong. "Not you, not Ches. You just don't love me enough."*

When I wrote to say I was coming as soon as the season ended, I heard nothing for weeks. Then a picture postcard: *Not necessary you come. I was wrong. Here is our estancio. The clouds are bigger, but what of that. Out walking yesterday saw a snake unhinge its jaw, pull itself over a small rabbit. One moved, one died, and all the eyes were still as fate. It didn't hurt as much as I thought. Not necessary you come. M.*

■

So, how do I answer the question, Dan, I wondered: "Any word from Marisol?" Which of an infinite number of simplifications should I use? Yes, she's fine, no, she's not, yes, but not recently, no, no word—easiest but least true—no, hardest and most true. Which? I didn't know. Didn't know anything. "Not for a while," I said. No answer to my letter, "plan on the fifteenth." No answer to my wire, "shall I come on the fifteenth?" No answer to my thoughts, "later? later still? ever?" No answer. No answer. On the fourteenth, I cancelled my reservation and waited. Noticed things. For one, the pores on my hands: bigger, they were, many and intersecting, the networks of age. For another, the soles of my shoes: noisy and unbearable. Every pair I owned, wherever I walked, sounded like cleats on glass. I was loose in the world, unarmed and dangerous, a racket of pores and shoes. Not abandoned, I'd say, so much as dismissed. So I agreed to meet Dan, when he called, at a Sabrett truck. To forget my pores like a Chinese checkerboard, my shoes possessed by the spirit of Vera Ellen's taps. To spend a few hours having the least possible meal, making the least possible conversation, going the least possible way to his home to commit more simplifications in the least possible bed. With the least possible fuss. Modern love, yes, this was it, this reductio ad—what?—mortem. Premortem, perhaps, but mortem all the same.

No.

Finally.

Finally, finally, no. Alone, maybe, for good, demented possibly—discovering whole civilizations in the human epidermis or the musicality of pumps versus wedgies. So be it. Possibility is what I had felt from Simón and Marisol. You can have either modern love—effortless and antiseptic as a hypodermic—or possibility, the blurred photographs, the passion, the lap and gloved hand, the camisole and bent knee, the figure eight, the evil thing, the half embraces with both arms, the full embraces with only one, the sobs, the silence. Even the silence.

Dan was looking for his key. Not keys. Never keys. Key. Key, comma, the least possible. Hardly slowing as we approached the small blue awning in front of his building.

"Some other time, Dan," I said, patting his arm just once as I kept walking.

"Huh?" he said.

Our final simplifications.

By the time I placed the call, it was snowing.

"Hola."

Not Marisol. Older, flatter somehow. I hesitated. "*La—casa Andrada?*" Whatever the woman answered, at least, started with "*si*" and ended with a question. "*Habla Usted inglés*?" It was worth a try.

No. *No puedo. Lo siento mucho.*

I inhaled. "*Me llamo* Francesca Perry. *Estoy en Nueva York*, *una amiga de*—"

Si, si, si. La Señora—pobrecita—mentioned me. *El Señor no está en casa ahora.*

Señor is not at home. Home or not, he was real again, a hemisphere away. The woman was explaining something—with many sighs and a voice low and steady as fate—I heard: never home, fire, so sad. "*Pero, que puede hacer? Nada.*

"*Por favor, quiero hablar con mi amiga. Está en casa la Señora?*" Silence. Had I lost the connection? "Hello? Are you there?"

When the woman's voice came again, it was high and full of regret. *Señorita, señorita, le ha dicho alguién? Ay de mí que cosa. No sabía Usted? La Señora—pobrecita—se morió hace dos meses. Comprende Usted? Ella se mató—había un fuego horrible. Nunca podré olvidarlo. El Señor trató de salvarla, pero—*

"What are you saying? What do you mean?"

"*Muerta. Ella esta muerta. Lo siento*—"

Muerta. Dead? Dead in a fire, after all? I must have hung up. I must have lived hours somewhere, awake, walking. By the time I felt the pain I was on the F train somewhere in Brooklyn—how late was it?—alone, in the last car. Through the door's glass I watched the train speed back from the tunnel that slipped and tugged. Tunnel falling away into tunnel, taking with it only our noise and our shadows. I swayed to the door, struggled with it, slammed it open, and heard my scream float away from me, so gone, so unremarkable.

In a year the studio had been rebuilt. The rooms were larger now, pale, chrome, and carpeted, making "the drama" a furtive thing somehow. A matter of soundproofing and décor—and fire extinguishers. All the rooms had them now, great silver cylinders mounted against chance and life: we'll have no more, they declare, no more of that. I turned off the light in the dressing room and went out. What was left were the daily mutinies against silence. Across the hall were persistent, soprano scales, overhead the slide, tap, tap of theater dance, and down the hall Madame—and Simón. Standing in the doorway to studio four, talking, nodding. He had come. Here. He was here.

I felt some part of me—a brisk part I'd come to know well over the past year—slide away. He'd call, he'd find me, this part felt, and then we'd talk, no problem, what's the hurry. I watched that brisk, daily, tweed and leather part of me nearly get away with it. Dragging the terror and lies behind me like tin cans tied to a dog's tail. Come on, come on, he'll call (but I won't answer the phone), he'll come by (but I won't open the door, won't come back to the studio, won't. Won't ever.) Hurry up, what are you waiting for, we can still get away.

Get away.

Get away with it.

Get by.

He turned. The husband of Marisol. We could have rushed together and from air, will and body parts shaped her again in our image and despair. Instead, we looked, like great pagan stones, our eyes flattened with time and knowledge. For a moment. Then red became purple—I'd forgotten it could—and there was hurt and relief. He shook his head, I turned out my hands. I saw his jacket, too thin for November, the collar turned up. I felt wild with the sudden memory.

He shrugged, nearly smiling. "I forgot a coat again," was all he said. Then my hands were covering my face and

I was howling for all the coats and promises forgotten. We were painstaking and formal those next two days, like invalids up for a try on legs that felt weak and new. We met for dinner, met for breakfast, missed lunch—the veal got hard, the wine warm, the eggs cold. We ordered carefully—such meaning, there seemed, in eggs over easy, such importance in whether the cheesecake was a light square or a creamy triangle—hardly smiled, hardly talked, but needed to be together. The story was slow and hesitant—the invalids in us fingered the sheer curtains, rubbed the smooth wooden poster.

He came home, he said (his hands flat on the table), one evening, half of the ranch house on fire, Adelina, Tomaso, the others, shouting, running, wringing their hands. Where was the Señora? Where was Marisol? There had been plenty of time to get out, they told him, plenty of time—but she was nowhere to be seen. They were wrong. He saw her, for a moment, at the second floor bedroom window. Ran inside, couldn't see the stairs, fell over a beam, and ran out. Get a ladder—someone shouted, maybe himself—a ladder, a blanket, something. He ran to the back, the door was jammed. Inside came the awful, crumpling sounds of wood falling, wood giving way, cracking into black powder. In front again, he looked up. Marisol! Marisol! Where's the ladder, bring the ladder. But the side of the house started to gape. She appeared, then, at the window, an indistinct blotch of red and white. The wind shifted the smoke and he saw her clearly: composed and smiling. For Christ's sake, jump, he cried. Jump. Jump! She looked at him with something like regret, and he knew she had chosen to stay, a white tern, small and collected on the bowsprit of a listing ship. Raging, he hurled a rock through a lower window, then another, and when he could no longer see her, remembers only breaking every window in the ranch house until Tomaso grabbed him, punched him, and he fell, rolling, the smell of grass and insanity stronger finally than the image of Marisol—white, composed and dying.

Livestock, he told me on the plane, cattle and horses. Cattle for profit, horses for love. I came, I told myself, to see. Partly. Where she lived. How she died. I came because I said I would. See? I could say to the rooms empty of Marisol: I said I would come and here I am. See? Rooms large and accepting as Adelina, with her yerba maté tea for me in the morning, Tomaso with his hobble and coiled rope, even the cattle plodding daily over the rise. No one points out, "too late," no one demands, "why now?" It's what we do for each other, somehow: we allow each other to carry through. The Romanovs, I sometimes think, were playing whist when the revolution came, and calmly finished the hand. My grandmother, one evening in 1938, listened respectfully as the radio told them that Earth had been invaded by Martians, then went to the kitchen to pack my grandfather's lunch pail for work the next day. We carry through. So I had come.

From the few things left of Marisol's, I chose a locket, a silver bookmark, a picture Dan had taken of us as Olivia and Viola, her arms around my neck—and the framed black and white photograph of Simón that had stood on her dresser all the time we lived together. He watched me choose. We annotated everything: her father gave her the locket when she was sixteen; that's the bookmark she used when she was working on a script; Tomaso took that shot of me, it's not very good, funny you both like it. "I miss her," I said, looking at her smile, her head against mine.

It was true. The feeling had nothing to do with theater and nothing to do with passion: it was little, simple, quick, plain and true. And mine. I miss her, I touched the shiny paper, all that was left of her lovely face. Even now, even now, I could only touch her on paper—I could love her now that she was this flat, smiling, motionless product of some darkroom eternity. No longer the first agony of loss, no longer the need to talk her into some kind of presence here with Simón. The keepsakes took up very little space in my suitcase. What now? I had seen, he had shown, we had talked, talked, talked. Still, she was dead; still, I was here; still, he was content. The moon was sharp and high. Outside, distant, were two figures walking up from the stables: Simón, I thought, and the mare I had seen him riding the day before. Her white blaze and stockings flashed like pantomime in the moonlight. I put on a jacket and went outside. It was cool.

He was tightening the saddle strap, smiled only a little when he saw me. The mare turned her head and pushed at him. I realized I didn't know him, and my jaw felt stiff with cold and sorrow. "Do you mind?" I said.

"No."

I stroked the mare's nose, her lip curving over my hand, checking for apples and not minding terribly when she didn't find any. "How long have you had her?"

"I bought her a month or so after I was married."

"She's nice."

"She's my favorite," Simón said. "I love her." He slapped her on the side; she snorted and sidestepped, her four legs moving at different times.

"What's her name?"

He stopped, for a moment, and looked unhappy. "Lady Anne," he said, pulling himself up into the saddle, clicking at her, turning her head toward the moon. I stepped back as they charged across the land, the sound of her hooves loud as a rockslide. Lady Anne. Had she known? In some bruised part of her, is this what Marisol had known? I crouched, shaking, staring into the changeless landscape, blowing into my hands. I watched as they returned, the moon higher, its light farther, the sound of horse and man like bright chatter. He pulled her up and was out of the saddle in a single motion. She snuffed out a small apple from his jacket pocket. (It was time, I thought, my hands stiff and clammy on my thighs.) He patted her, frowned, then they both turned. Backlit by the moon, they looked at me. (It was time. I stood.) "Do you want to try?" he said, brushing the sweat from her flanks. The white blaze, the clouds darker than the moon, the smell of jacaranda, the hard Argentine soil underfoot: it was time.

Clumsy and deliberate, I went over to him, put my hand on the side of his neck. Why did it feel like grief, our heads together, faces down for warmth and love, arms new? *Perdidos. Enamoratos.* What they had been. Fast and gone as our white breath in the night air. Marisol. We name you. Less. And less. □

ROBIN REAGLER

WARNING TO BRIDGE TROLLS, IN AT LEAST FIVE VOICES

I would seem fancy if I were grown up
Is it always this chilly
Do we *got* to wear shoes
Can you listen to the questions when I try hard to ask
How many faces
Have the dogs been fed
Would the blue dog wear shoes
Does the dog want to eat us
Would someone call her mother if a little girl got lost
What just stopped loving us
We are coming to a bridge
What just rolled off
It's just like a story Daddy told about goats
Keep your shoes on, Tom
The first song just rolled off
Should we run like dogs when we get to the bridge
What will you sing if the bridge is blue
What will you wear if I act my age
When the blue dog arrives, can I wear your scarf
Ain't them other kids chicken, look
If no one dies, will you be disappointed
Do you feel lonely when we all hold hands
What you sing will warm you up
Tom is not fancy but he doesn't care
How much longer 'til we go back to momma
Wouldn't you rather cross bridges on Tuesday
What lives in the space between girders and water
Tom, Tom, do *we* believe in the troll
Hello, grand central, could you send out some firemen
Tom, I'm, scared—promise not to tell
Fill up the space with the song about bridges
What you put in the space will push back on the riddle

CIVIL WAR

Sarah Rossiter

Eliot Jarvis smelled Sue Ellen the minute she stepped into the room. He sniffed loudly. Orange blossoms and honey. "I'll take her," he said.

Louise sighed. If only she wasn't so tired. In the three weeks she'd been down here she hadn't had one good night's sleep. All night, every night a mockingbird sang outside her window. She dreamt of broken glass, woke to the slither of lizards on the roof. Her back ached from the soft mattress. Every morning she inspected her slippers for scorpions. She was so tired that her father's behavior no longer embarrassed her. "We think the stroke has affected more than his legs," she said, quietly, to Sue Ellen.

Sue Ellen walked over to the bed, and tapped Eliot lightly on the forehead. "Are you crazy, Mr. Jarvis?" she said.

Eliot opened his eyes. Because of his cataracts he saw only shadows, but the orange blossom scent was stronger than ever.

"Whose side are you on?" he asked.

"Yours, I think," said Sue Ellen, "but I need to know what I'm getting myself in for."

Louise felt a headache coming on; she pressed her fingers to her forehead. Her knuckles cracked. "He's talking about the Civil War," she said. "North or South."

"The South will rise again," said Eliot, lifting a trembling fist in the air.

Sue Ellen caught hold of his wrist, lowered his arm gently onto the sheets. Light as a feather, she thought. A bird's wing. A baby bird. She shivered.

"My father thinks the wrong side won," said Louise, closing her eyes against the pain in her head. She should never have let Sue Ellen in the door. Her hair was too long, her breasts too large. She wore red clogs, and her toes looked dirty.

"Don't think," said Eliot, "I know."

"I like the south myself," said Sue Ellen. "It's the sun. Astral energy."

Louise, her eyes still closed, wondered if madness might be catching. Perhaps in tropical heat, it spread from person to person, like mould. She must pull herself together. She opened her eyes, and faced Sue Ellen.

"Tell me," she said, "just what kind of experience you've had in caring for the elderly."

"None," said Sue Ellen. "But I figure I can learn." And she smiled at Louise who did not smile back.

"If I'm not mistaken," said Louise, "the ad you answered specifically asked for a 'well qualified' companion."

"Well qualified, *cheerful* companion," said Sue Ellen, pulling the crumpled ad from her skirt pocket, "and I figured I was cheerful enough to make up for not being qualified." She kept on smiling to show Louise just how cheerful she was, though it was clear that Louise didn't like her. It made her sad; she was used to being liked. "I never have any trouble getting along with people," she said.

"The job is difficult," said Louise. "My father is not well. He will need help walking, dressing, eating, in fact with *all* his personal needs."

"Peeing," said Eliot, afraid he had been forgotten. And he liked shocking people, especially Louise.

Sue Ellen laughed. Louise did not. "Frankly," she said to Sue Ellen, "I have difficulty understanding just why you applied."

"It's a long story," said Sue Ellen, not knowing what she could say that Louise would understand. She was a Virgo for sure, one gone sour, like fruit left too long on a tree. Sue Ellen couldn't help feeling sorry for her with her pinched white face and bony hands. "The cold," she said at last, "it got to me. I've been up north for fifteen years now, and suddenly, I felt the cold. Inside." She poked her stomach with her finger. "I'm twenty-nine," she said.

Twenty-nine! Louise was fifty-one, and felt a migraine coming on. An outrage to waste youth on someone like Sue Ellen. Louise doubted she'd even finished high school. "That doesn't answer my question," she said.

"Roots," said Sue Ellen. "I grew up down here." She saw Louise's eyes widen, and laughed. "Not here," she said. "I grew up inland. My grandpa, he raised me, and I thought I'd surprise him. Like I said, it's been fifteen years, and we'd lost touch. Trouble is," she said, taking a deep breath, "turns out the surprise was on me. When I got to West Palm this morning, I called from the airport, and Georgie, our neighbor, told me he'd died last year. He died, and I never even knew." She pulled a soiled Kleenex from her pocket, and blew her nose. Louise averted her eyes. "Anyway," said Sue Ellen, "there I was with a one way ticket to nowhere. So I bought a local paper, and sat down to think, and then I saw the ad, and here I am." She tried another cheerful smile which was hard because what she really wanted to do was cry, and anyway, she could tell Louise wasn't believing a word. So she stared at the pink foxes leaping all over Louise's long-sleeved, high-necked blouse, and wondered why anyone would wear something so ugly especially when that somebody had red hair.

Louise wondered if perhaps Sue Ellen had spent some time in a mental institution. "Is it the money?" she asked. "Do you need money?" Sue Ellen blinked. "Excuse me?" she said with what sounded like genuine bewilderment. But who could tell? There was a certain softness to Sue Ellen's face that reminded Louise of a woman she had once seen leaning against a building on Lake Shore Drive. Louise, who as always had her camera with her, had tried but could not bring herself to photograph the woman's face. It was somehow too intimate, too exposed. Though it was winter, the woman's feet were bare, slender and white, striking against the winter rubble of a city sidewalk. The photograph, entitled 'Survivor,' was Louise's first success.

Louise sighed. "But why *this* job?" she said, trying one last time.

"Karma," said Sue Ellen. "And I liked the word 'companion.' It sounded cozy." She smiled at Louise, shy, like a child with a secret. "I get lonesome sometimes," she said.

Karma. Louise looked away from Sue Ellen, down at her father. He was so still, so quiet. Perhaps he had died. But his fingers clutched the sheet, and the sheet fluttered, rising and falling with his breathing. "You are the seventh applicant," she said, more to herself than to Sue Ellen.

Sue Ellen clapped her hands. "I knew it," she said. "My lucky number. I'm Cancer," she said. "The seventh month."

"I see," said Louise, seeing nothing, wishing only for the strength to send her away.

"Actually," said Sue Ellen, "I'm really into astrology. 'When in doubt, check it out' is my motto. Always has been. That's why I bought the paper at the airport, to read my horoscope. And what do you think it was?"

"I have no idea," said Louise, dropping the words like stones.

"Use Care In Motion," Sue Ellen said. "So I did. I never read the paper carefully, but today I turned every page real slow, and that's how come I saw the ad at the very bottom of the last page."

Louise waited. So did Sue Ellen. "I'm sorry," said Louise. Eliot sniffed, sensing danger. "I am sinking," he said, "into oblivion." He chuckled. He always enjoyed a joke, especially his own.

The women looked down. His head had slipped from the pillows, mouth and chin buried beneath the sheet. He felt hands tugging, pulling him up. Louise pinched, her fingers bony and moist, like chicken wings. Sue Ellen's hands were firm and plump, juices running under the skin. "When can you start?" he asked.

"Right now," said Sue Ellen. "I travel light." She smiled at Louise to indicate her willingness to be friends. "If it's okay with your daughter, that is."

"Why shouldn't it be?" said Eliot, surprised. He had, after all, made his wishes clear. "Tell Dolores to set for three. Bouillon." Decisions tired him; he slept.

Louise watched him sleeping. His eyelids, thin as paper, fluttered. What she wouldn't give to sleep so easily. He slept as a child sleeps, palms up, his fingers curled. A still life. She thought, briefly, of taking his picture now, while he lay sleeping. Whenever she tried for a photograph, he would sulk and fidget. "Second rate," he muttered. Was he referring to himself, an old man no longer photogenic, or to her profession. "You know I can't see," he would say when Louise, in the past, had come to visit, bringing photographs to show him. "I can't see a thing," he said, long before his eyesight failed him.

Over the years she had tried and tried to capture him on film, to preserve some likeness. But the light was too bright, the shade too intense, and he would never sit still. Now it was too late. He lay on his back, his eyes closed, his mouth open, looking like someone she had never seen before.

Louise looked at the photograph above his bed. It had always been her favorite, one taken by her mother, when Louise was sixteen, dancing in her father's arms on the beach. The tide was out, the sand hard and smooth, and Eliot, in evening dress, gold stick pin, white tails flying, pointed one hand towards the pale evening sky. "The first star," he said, and Louise remembered his eyes so bright that she could see her face reflected. He kissed her cheek. "Venus," he said.

He had always been a ladies' man.

He slept. Louise turned away, pressing her forehead against the window. The glass was warm. The hot sun beat against the orange trees bent low with fruit, and on the terrace lizards lay basking, tongues flickering like fire.

"I think your father likes me," Sue Ellen said, quietly, shyly, hoping to make Louise feel better.

"My father," said Louise, "likes no one but himself." The words, once out, immediately regretted. Such things were never said, not even to oneself. It was the heat.

"He is a gentleman," she said. "He must be treated with respect!"

Sue Ellen's eyes were wide and puzzled. "Why!" She stretched her hands, beseeching, toward Louise, "I wouldn't dream . . ."

Eliot dreamt. On a white horse he rode on wet sand towards the enemy, clustered like coconuts beneath the bougainvillea. Rebel flag flying, his saber raised. "Charge!" he cried.

Hands lifted him from the bed, secured his robe, wheeled him to lunch. He smelled blossoms, bouillon. "Ah," he said. He smacked his lips. "Delicious." The warmth was delicious, sliding down inside. A gentle

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warmth. Clear soup was essential. He felt his strength returning. "Remember, my dear," he said to Sue Ellen, "you must always crack the bones to extract the marrow."

"Okay, Mr. Jarvis." Sue Ellen had already finished her soup. She hoped there was more to come. In the heat her appetite had returned. She liked things sweet and thick, oatmeal with cream, stews and puddings. Mr. Jarvis was a gentleman all right. He had beautiful fingernails, and small elegant feet. Old as he was, his voice was rich and full, the words coming from the back of his throat. "Are you English?" she asked, thinking of his accent, trying not to think of cracking bones.

Eliot chuckled. He was quite full, quite restored. He held his spoon to his heart. "'Into the valley of death rode the six hundred,'" he said loudly, and chuckled again. "Does that answer your question, my dear?"

"No," said Sue Ellen. Her stomach growled, and she coughed to cover the sound.

She did not cover her mouth. Her teeth were white, her tongue pink. Louise looked away, at the family portraits lining the wall. The sunlight, filtered through bamboo shutters, laid strips of shadow across them, like bars. They had hung there as far back as Louise could remember.

"The answer," said Louise, "is yes. On both sides. Both sides, in fact, came over on the Mayflower."

"Far out!" said Sue Ellen. "Pilgrims."

"Confederates!" said Eliot. "Five generations. Louise is the last of the line."

Sue Ellen patted his hand. His skin, though wrinkled, spotted with brown, was soft. He smelled of talcum. "But the South's going to rise again. Right?" She smiled.

"Precisely," said Eliot. "Beauregard, though a relative, was a fool. After luncheon I will show you the strategy."

Louise lowered her spoon. She was not the least bit hungry, certainly not for hot soup. "My father," she said, "lives in the past."

Sue Ellen, elbows on the table, leaned toward her. "I guess we all do, one way or another."

Louise noticed a piece of parsley stuck between Sue Ellen's front teeth. Eliot slapped the table. The candlesticks shivered. "Where's the roughage," he said. Perhaps they deserved each other, thought Louise. She rang the silver bell, and waited. Waited, thinking of gold leaves dropping on the frozen ground, of bare branches pressed against a silver sky. As always, out of habit, she had brought her camera down, but up north, in her dark room, negatives waited for release. Her life on hold.

Sue Ellen jumped at the sound of the bell. She picked the parsley from her teeth, and waited to see what would happen next. It was the kind of bell she imagined God ringing to summon his angels. Rich people were something else. Except for the starchy crackle of her white uniform, Dolores might have been an angel. Or maybe a ghost. She was that quiet, that old. Older than Mr. Jarvis, it seemed, with lips thin as hairpins, and bumpy blue veins running up her skinny arms. She held the salad bowl out in front as if for balance.

Sue Ellen was the last to be served. She counted five pieces of lettuce, three cherry tomatoes, and one radish. Maybe rich people didn't have to eat. She was sure of this when the next course turned out to be little glass bowls of water, one for each. Two gulps, and it was gone. Not only that but the water was warm, a hint of perfume in the taste. She saw Louise watching, and smiled.

Louise rested her head in her hands. It was too much. Her father was blind, her mother dead. What friends she had were in Chicago. The clock on the sideboard ticked, and the thermometer registered eighty-nine degrees. Her father's age. He might die tomorrow or live for another ten years. Behind Sue Ellen, Louise saw the bars of sunlight move slowly along the wall.

Eliot dabbed his fingers in the bowl, spilling water. Drops lay on the polished surface, like tears or diamonds. He licked his fingers dry, tasting orange blossoms. He saw the light reflected in the drops of water, the silver bell. He saw light, and shadow. "Lovely!" he said.

"Really," said Louise, "he should be in a Home."

Eliot lifted his head toward the shadow that was Louise. "I am," he said. "My own."

Louise sighed. An only child; the burden was hers, "We'll try for a month," she said. "And then we'll see."

From Chicago she could see nothing at all. She slept better, but not well enough, and when she slept she dreamt of spiders. She called every night, cradling the white phone in her lap, threading the cord through her fingers. "Marvelous," her father said. "We appear to be winning."

"Terrific!" said Sue Ellen, her voice juicy as though chewing gum. "We're having a real good time."

"I see," said Louise. She saw nothing, could only imagine, imagined the two of them sitting side by side on the family sofa, their legs touching. Her mother had once spanked Louise for chewing gum. "Ladies do not!" she had said. Sue Ellen, whatever she might be, was certainly not a lady. Louise felt some relief that her mother had been spared this final humiliation. A woman of grace and beauty, she had died gracefully, slipping away in sleep in her eighty-second year. The day of the funeral a hurricane threatened. Rain beat against the windows; her father stayed home. "So devoted," murmured the guests. Louise had bowed her head as though in prayer. "Adored," she said. "Adored." On Louise's dresser stood a photograph; her mother in bridal dress and train, gloves, gown, and veil white. Only her eyes were dark. Unsmiling, she stared at some distant point beyond the camera. "What were you looking at?" Louise once asked. "Nothing," said her mother. "Nothing at all."

Sue Ellen, when Eliot napped after lunch, stripped and lay in the sun on the terrace. The terrace, ringed by a pink wall, circled by orange trees, was hushed and hot. Sweat poured from her skin, staining the stones. Sue Ellen, eyes closed, face to the sun, smiled. The trees, untended, hung heavy, squirrels chattering in the branches. As the sun moved, Sue Ellen inched across the stones, following the light. Thirsty, she plucked oranges, and biting through the skin, sucked at the juice. With sticky fingers she planted the seeds beneath the gardenia.

At three she woke Eliot. "It's time," she said. "For

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what?" asked Eliot, rising from a warm sea of sleep. He smelled gardenias. "You'll see," said Sue Ellen, lifting him. "A surprise for your daughter when she comes back down."

"Louise has never been one for surprises," he said. Within the circle of Sue Ellen's arm, he sat upright on the edge of the bed. Legs dangling, his feet felt cold. The floor seemed far away. "I lay there for three hours before Dolores came," he said.

Sue Ellen heard the quiver in his voice. "It won't happen again," she said. She held him close, his head against her shoulder. Light as a leaf, she thought. His hand clutched her leg. Beneath pale skin, she saw the delicate tracery of veins. "We're going to get you walking," she said. "We're going to take us a walk on the beach." Eliot, drowsy on her shoulder, said nothing. Sue Ellen didn't mind; she was used to talking to herself. The beach was so close that on quiet days she could hear the waves rolling in. She liked the sound. Like clapping hands. "Listen," she said. Carefully she pulled the pajama top over his head. "You hear those waves?"

Eliot cocked his head. "'Break, Break, Break,'" he chanted.

She slipped on a blue shirt, bent to button. "Nothing's going to break," she said, "but first we've got to get you walking fast enough to cross that highway between us and the ocean."

"The enemy," he said. "I'd rather not."

"Not yet," said Sue Ellen. "But you will. We've got plenty of time."

Time. Sue Ellen forgot to wind the clocks; the hands stopped moving. Sunlight woke them into morning, Dolores called them into meals. The days flowed one into the next. Sue Ellen hid the wheelchair. On her arm. Eliot shuffled in his slippers from room to room. His legs trembled, his heart fluttered like a trapped bird. "She wants me dead," he said to Louise on the phone. He chuckled.

Louise, phone pressed to her ear, watched the snow drift against the window, stick, then slide down onto the city streets below. The day before, walking through light snow, she watched a car leap the curb, and catching a stroller beneath its wheels, tear off down the street. The baby's blue mittens, tied to strings, fluttered out like butterflies. Watching, Louise felt no surprise. She stood beside the mother who remained motionless, arms outstretched, fingers still curled, and felt only relief that the baby was not hers. She saw the hands, cropped, framed by glass, white and still, a curve of agony against the black wet street. She sighed. "I better come down," she said.

"Nonsense," said Eliot. "I was being facetious."

"Louise has always lacked a sense of humor," he said to Sue Ellen as she tucked him in bed for the night. She smoothed his sheets, the hair from his forehead.

"She loves you," said Sue Ellen. "She worries."

"She does not know what love is," said Eliot, crossly.

Sue Ellen wondered if that might be true. She kissed his cheek. "Sleep tight," she said.

The slow days and the naptime sunning tired her. She slept and woke and slept again, rising and falling gently as if riding waves. All her life she'd been a rolling stone. She smelled the jasmine, heard the sweep and rustle of the palms. The bed was soft. Over the intercom came the whistle and snort of Eliot's breathing. She didn't mind; she liked the company. She dreamt of love.

"There was this baby on the plane," she said at breakfast. Her face felt soft from sleep, her skin polished by the sun.

"Where's my bran?" said Eliot.

Sue Ellen rang the bell. "This is the life," she said. Sunlight filled the room. Gardenias floated in a crystal vase. Dolores brought cereal and cream, toast and coffee. "Thank you," said Sue Ellen. She no longer drank her fingerbowl. She poured cream on their cereal, into their coffee. "He was the cutest," she said. "I never knew babies could be so cute."

"How many have you had?" asked Eliot, smacking his lips over his bran, enjoying the crunch.

Sue Ellen laughed. "None," she said. She tipped the bowl to her mouth for the rest of the cream. "I've never been married."

"Good," said Eliot. She was his. Her hands woke him in the morning, tucked him in at night. She filled his days. She *was* his days. He remembered his manners. "Though not from want of suitors. Of that I'm sure."

Sunlight settled on the gardenias. She'd picked them only yesterday, already they were turning brown. "I guess," she said. "But somehow I could never seem to settle down. I'm twenty-nine." She sighed. "Who would have thought."

She didn't think. She watched the dust motes rise and drift on shafts of light, settle on books and tables, silver bowls and chairs. She felt the weight of house, of history. "All these things," she said, "this stuff about your ancestors. Does it make you feel safe?"

Eliot straightened in his chair. "I have never lacked for courage," he said.

"I know," said Sue Ellen. She patted his hand. "You're something else, Mr. Jarvis."

He was. Every day he grew a little stronger. He learned to do buttons, could get to the bathroom by himself. All alone he fought his way across the living room from chair to chair. Grasping the piano, he flexed his legs, one, two, three. "Knee bends," he said, gasping for air. Sue Ellen heard his knees creak, but as for bending she couldn't see a thing. "I am just so proud!" she said. "Now let me see." She took his hand, palm up, and ran her finger lightly down his life line. It tickled. Eliot shivered. "I thought so," she said. "It says here you're going to live forever." Eliot, exhausted, chuckled. The battle all but won. "I never doubted," he said.

He slept. Sue Ellen slept too, flat on her back in the terrace sun. Her nose peeled pink. The orange seeds sprouted, green shoots too fragile to touch. She looked at her palm, her life line, and held her breath. Every day she read her horoscope, everyday it read USE CARE IN MOTION. In the heavens Venus was colliding with Mars. She could only hope. She picked oranges and lemons, oleander and hibiscus, filling the house with fruit and flowers.

Eliot woke to the roar of guns. "They're coming," he said. "We must prepare."

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"The waves," said Sue Ellen. "The wind's blowing in from the ocean today."

"We must take no chances," said Eliot. Rising slowly, he shuffled to his desk. "Open it," he said, and Sue Ellen did. "What do you see?" he asked. Sue Ellen saw old photographs, faded letters, rusty keys. "Not much," she said.

Eliot took command. "Pull out the center drawer," he said. His finest hour. "Now slide your hand in, feel the latch." Sue Ellen slid her hand in, caught the latch. A secret drawer sprang open. "Far out!" Sue Ellen said. Inside the drawer were hundreds of bills, tied and stacked in bundles. "Shouldn't you keep them in a bank?" she said.

"Confederate," said Eliot. "My legacy. The South will rise again, you know."

"I know," Sue Ellen said. "But counterfeit money, shouldn't it look like the real thing? These are so big."

"They are the real thing," Eliot glared. "I thought you were on my side."

"I am," she said. Life was too short to worry. "As long as you don't try to use it. You'd get in trouble."

"I'm not a fool," said Eliot. He closed the drawer.

They walked in the afternoons, up and down the street, Eliot on Sue Ellen's arm. The street was quiet, sheltered. Only the tips of the tall palms swayed in the wind. Across the highway the waves roared. They crept along, Sue Ellen, her face tipped skyward to catch the last of the sun. They barely moved. Sue Ellen didn't mind. Time stood still, and she was happy.

They ate ice cream for dessert. Dolores served, Sue Ellen poured the sauce. Scraping Eliot's plate, she spooned the last of it into his mouth, clicking the spoon against his teeth. "They're mine," he said. The sweetness of the chocolate produced an ache that made his eyes water. "You're something else," Sue Ellen said. "I think it's time we hit that beach. You ready to give it a try?"

"No," said Eliot. "We are surrounded."

Louise called. "It's been a month," she said. "I'm coming down."

"No need for that," said Eliot. "I couldn't be in better hands."

Louise had noticed Sue Ellen's hands. The nails chewed ragged, down to the quick, the skin more gray than white. Diseased. "Mother would not approve," she said.

"Your mother," he said, "is dead."

Louise's fingers tightened on the phone. "I'll talk to Sue Ellen," she said. Waiting, she heard the click and mumble of the phone being passed from hand to hand. On the wall her photographs hung framed. Winter branches against a winter sky, a child weeping. "The stark simplicity," the critics said. "A purity of vision." Louise sighed.

"I'm coming down," she said.

"Terrific!" said Sue Ellen. "You won't believe your eyes!"

Her eyes. She had to strain now to see things at a distance. For reading she wore glasses. She was almost fifty-two. "Tomorrow," she said. "In time for dinner."

Sue Ellen clapped her hands. "She's going to be so pleased!" she said.

"I have my doubts," said Eliot. "She was often peevish as a child."

They sat together on the sofa. The night was warm, the windows open. Moths banged against the screens, and on the walls the ancestors hung in shadow. "I'm scared," Sue Ellen said. Eliot held her hand between his own. "We must take the offensive," he said.

"Try and be nice," said Sue Ellen. "Make her feel welcome."

"We shall plan a dinner party," Eliot said.

"Far out," Sue Ellen said. "I love a party."

She polished silver, waxed the wood, and even, standing on the table, washed the chandelier. The crystal tinkled, shone like stars. So pretty that Sue Ellen laughed out loud. She felt much better. Her horoscope that morning said GOOD THINGS ARE GOING TO HAPPEN. She could feel her psychic juices flowing.

Eliot ordered dinner, sent for wine, and rested. At six they dressed with care, and waited at the door to welcome her. The only light came from the moon.

In the moonlight Sue Ellen's face looked black. Louise, weighed down by luggage, came slowly up the walk. Her father stood, framed in the doorway, leaning on his cane, Sue Ellen's arm. His face in shadow. She kissed his cheek, but could not bring herself to shake Sue Ellen's hand. "I'm tired," she said. "The trip."

The house reeked of flowers, the stench of stagnant water, rotting leaves. "A homecoming dinner," said Sue Ellen. "Your father planned it just for you." She wore a necklace made of shells. Her arms were bare. She touched Louise's shoulder. "Doesn't he look fantastic!" she said. Her Indian skirt had tiny bells that jingled when she moved. Louise pulled away. "I wouldn't know," she said, her voice so cold that Sue Ellen shivered.

Eliot felt a draft. Alert, he cocked his head, and listened. "As I thought. A night attack." His hands gripped the chair.

"Let's eat first," Sue Ellen said. "We'll need our strength." A full moon always made her hungry. Jittery too. Born on the cusp of Cancer, she was especially sensitive to the moon. Rising, she drew the curtains. "There," she said. "We're safe till morning."

The curtains drawn, the room was stifling, the soup so hot the spoon burned Louise's fingers. She dropped it with a clatter. Eliot jumped. "I have my doubts," he said, soup dribbling down his chin. Louise closed her eyes. Up north, she thought, the snow was falling, quiet and cold. Only this afternoon she had looked out the window of the plane as it coasted down the runway, looked out through a curtain of snow to see the wing, coated with ice. She had held her breath as the plane gathered speed, lifted itself, groaning, into the air. She waited, imagining the creak of metal, the severing of bone. It was not death she minded, but the falling. She rubbed her eyes. "I'm tired," she said. "We almost crashed."

Eliot's soup was gone. Licking his spoon, he brandished it in the air. "One must take precautions," he said.

Once he had fallen, crashing to the floor as though someone had taken an axe to his legs. Surprised, he had watched the floor rising to meet his face. He smiled at his guests. "United we stand, divided we fall," he said.

"We are united," Sue Ellen said, smiling across the table at Louise. "We waited for you. Tomorrow we're going to walk to the beach. I think he can make it now."

"You shouldn't humor him."

"I'm not," Sue Ellen said with surprise. "I really think he can."

"Not that. His mind. The Civil War."

"It's just his way. Underneath I think he knows."

Knows what? What had her father ever known? The candles flickered; the table gleamed. She might be a child again, white socks and tightly braided hair, called in to greet the guests. "Curtsey now," her mother said, and Louise curtseyed, circling, pressing damp fingers into white-gloved hands. "Who's this?" her father said, eyebrows raised in mock surprise. He laughed, enjoying his joke. The guests laughed too while Louise hid blushing behind her hands. Only her mother sat serene, unsmiling. "Up straight, Louise. One always makes an effort."

All her life. An effort. She pushed her soup away. "Mother," she said, looking directly at Sue Ellen, "was a true lady."

"I wish I could have met her," Sue Ellen said, to be polite, but what she really wished was for Louise to eat her soup so she could ring the bell. The soup was thin, Sue Ellen hungry.

"They were devoted," said Louise.

"Cold," said Eliot. "Cold as ice."

Sue Ellen patted his shoulder. "You'll warm up soon," she said, and decided to go ahead and ring the bell anyway. She rang it loud. Eliot chuckled. "The call to arms," he said. Louise looked at her mother's bell in Sue Ellen's hand. The nails still chewed, the knuckles raw, cheap silver bracelets jangling on her wrist. "This can't go on!" she said. She felt relief. A lifting.

Sue Ellen heard the joyful anger in Louise's voice. Carefully she set the bell down on the table. "I thought, maybe we could take a picnic down, just the three of us. I thought a picnic would be real nice, especially if the wind stops blowing."

"It's out of the question," Louise said, somewhat more gently. Now that the day was hers, she could afford to be more charitable. Besides, she was surprised by the longing in Sue Ellen's voice. A child's longing, small and sad. She looked at her father who sat huddled inside his velvet smoking jacket. Locked in his private world, he stared intensely at the candle flames. In his lapel hibiscus flowered, a trumpet of bright blood. "What you need," she said to Sue Ellen, "is a family of your own. You're young. There's still time."

"It feels like," Sue Ellen said, easing the words out slow, "time's the one thing I haven't got. I'm twenty-nine already."

Her breath touched the flames, set them dancing. Eliot, entranced, watched the spinning pinwheels of light. He stretched his hand toward them, but they were too far away. "Time is of the essence," he said. "You must be prepared."

"I know that," said Sue Ellen, "but it's hard. All my life I've been a rolling stone, and what do I have to show for it?" She lifted her hands to show their emptiness. Eliot saw the flutter, heard the jingle of her bracelets. He caught her hand, and brought it to his lips. The skin was hot and dry. "The money," he said, with gallantry, "is yours."

Louise stiffened. "The money is mother's," she said.

Sue Ellen smiled. "You're real kind, Mr. Jarvis. A real gentleman. But I don't exactly know what I'd do with it."

"Why, use it of course. Any way you wish. Your wish, my dear, is my command." Gently he released her hand, and waited.

Sue Ellen propped her chin on her hands, and stared unblinking into the candle flame. She liked the way the light spread out in ripples so that the rest of the room fell away. There was only the light. Her eyes watered. "I guess I haven't gotten much farther than the beach in the wish department. Mostly I take things a day at a time."

"Tomorrow," said Louise. "Tomorrow you will have to leave."

Sue Ellen kept right on staring at the flames. "Once," she said, "when I was real little, Grandpa took me to the beach. Just once. I begged and begged. Little Mary Sunshine, he used to call me. Didn't mean it as a compliment though. He took life real hard." Sue Ellen sighed. "Well," she said, "the minute we got there, Grandpa started in digging this hole. He didn't bring a spade or anything, just his hands, but the sand was soft. He dug like a dog, bending down, and scooping it out between his legs. I stood there, watching, thinking he was playing. Maybe he was. When he was done, he straightened up, groaning, and holding onto his back. His face was all red. "Get in," he said. So I did. It was a game, I thought. Right away he started shoveling the sand back into the hole, fast as he could, until the only part of me left showing was my head. I couldn't move, not even a toe. I couldn't look up either but I knew he was standing over me because his shadow was blocking the sun. He was breathing hard. "Let me out," I said.

"Now you know what it feels like," he said. "Now you know!"

Louise felt a shivering inside. The lives some people led!

"Well," said Sue Ellen, "I knew all right, and I didn't like it. Sometimes I think I've been running ever since. Sometimes," she leaned towards Louise, "sometimes I just get so scared."

Louise's shivering increased. She couldn't understand it. Perhaps she was coming down with something. She felt as if a cold wind were blowing right through her, revealing holes. She saw Sue Ellen's hands, cupped, and empty.

Eliot slapped the table. "There's nothing to lose," he said. "We shall plan a counter-attack."

Sue Ellen was embarrassed. "I don't know what got into me," she said. "Talking on that way." She gave herself a shake, like a dog coming out of water. Her hair flew every which way.

Dolores circled silently, clearing the table. Louise pressed her hands together for warmth, and bowed her head. Sue Ellen wondered if she were praying. She remembered what Louise had said about humoring her father. She patted Eliot's hand. "You still with us, Mr. Jarvis?" she asked.

"Where else would I be?" said Eliot, crossly.

During the night it rained, a quiet steady drumming on the roof. Eliot, sleeping, heard the hooves of horses galloping. He danced on the beach with Louise in his arms. Light as a cloud in silver slippers, a dusting of freckles on bare arms. She smelled of cinnamon, of cream. "Daddy," she said, smiling into his eyes. "Daddy." The sound of horses drawing nearer. They were coming; and he was not prepared. "Darling," he cried. But no one answered. No one came.

Sue Ellen woke to the sound of the rain. The room was dark, the moon behind the clouds. Waning now. Waning. Her body made a hollow in the bed. She hugged the warmth, listened to the lacy rustle of the leaves, the drip of water off the roof. Out there, her tiny trees, leaves cupped like hands to catch the rain. They were so very small, no bigger than her little finger. She hoped they would survive. She hoped.

Louise slept soundly. She dreamt of flying, the plane's slow lifting, lumbering up through cloud. She woke, remembering the dazzle of sudden sunlight on the icy wing, the instant shattering of the ice. A miracle of broken glass that left the wing stripped clean. Light, the plane lifted free.

Louise felt refreshed. The rain had stopped, the morning blue and cool, as if some balance had been restored. Sue Ellen's door was open, the room empty. Her father's door was closed. The house was quiet, the sun just rising. Over the ocean the sky was pink.

She walked towards the ocean, her camera on her shoulder. The street was still; no cars passed. Crushed shells glittered, embedded in cement. She crossed the highway, and eased through the private gate, up the small rise of grass to where the beach began. And there she stopped.

On the edge of the water her father stood, leaning on two canes. Wearing white ducks and dark blue blazer, he was dressed to kill. The ocean, beaten flat by rain, glistened, and on the smooth white sand, Sue Ellen, in bare feet, danced in circles. Louise heard the tinkle of bells, saw brown legs, pink soles flashing, saw her hands flung upwards towards the sky. She saw money flutter down, a slow and gentle drifting, like snow or birds. She held her breath. Sue Ellen laughed, a high bright sound. Whirling and spinning, the bills, caught in currents of air, rose and fell, in the water, on sand. Louise reached out, plucked one from the air. Robert E. Lee, his saber drawn, rode bravely into battle.

Sue Ellen, dancing, spun towards her, stopped, and waved. "Come on down," she cried. Her father turned, slowly, and the gold buttons on his blazer caught the sunlight, winking like stars. Louise lifted her camera, brought it into focus as, slowly, her father raised one cane and stood erect, holding it, a sword, a beacon, above his head. ☐

ALBERTO RIOS

THE CORNER UNCLE

He has listened to his records
So much they are scratched,
So much he must believe now
Chopin is performed in the rain,
That the Nocturnes all along
Had been missing
Some section of orchestra.

I listen with him sometimes, hum,
Remember with him what he remembers:
How the spear-tip hair of his temples
Used to catch under his moose's brows,
Keeping them from moving almost,
The way screen door latch mechanisms
Might, determining the potential
For movement on his face: only
Smiling was very dangerous.
Because, he explained to me,
When he did, his brows would go
Up, his temple hair would slide and hit
His eyes like a sharp finger,
And this was no good at all,
So he laughed only at extreme wit,
Thereby keeping his ordered face
Scientifically from falling
In parts to a pile on the floor.

But the hair on his head
Has been through the years
Like a glass of beer drunk down,
Receding as if carefully sipped
Until the taker is filled,
And the head left empty
But for the spots and bits at the bottom.

In the parking lot of the Public Library
The brown baggers pee themselves out
In front of us all
Until they're hollow and can't stand.
I watch, and when I get home
I watch myself, the falling line of me,
Myself a little less, I feel it.

ROGER MITCHELL

MOTELS

This would do as well as any abandoned cottage
on a cliff above the sea, the long grass waving
in what would have been a pasture or sown field.
This might have been a pasture, too, at one time,
with sheep grazing at the foot of the bed
and the farmer, swaddled in revery,
slouching across the road from the Burger King.
He cannot imagine anything like this
happening to the world.

I could do this among coffee shops, too,
book stores, restaurants, ballet and the theatre.
A few passionate people adrift among the millions,
a certain table or booth,
a checked tablecloth with stains,
long philosophical conversations
followed by long silent walks alone
or speeches to the stars.

It is not easy to create such pure transience.
It is true that the Burger King is just across the road,
and that the road is constant with traffic,
and that the whole of Albany
is a few miles to the southeast.
These things do not reduce remoteness, as we know,
but make a landscape in which it can occur,
a place where the wind, in fact, has an exact fit.
I can go to the front desk
and ask the night clerk for a bar of soap,
and without looking at me
or at the soap, he can place it in my hand.

I can shower. And, when I am through,
shower again. And all that time,
I can leave the television on.
It is not necessary to watch television
for there to be television,
as it is not necessary for me to look in the mirror
for there to be mirrors everywhere,
showing me what narrow shoulders I have,
what thin limbs.

The person who slept here last night
left nothing behind, no hair in the sink,
no fingerprint on the glass. He got away
and is eating now at the Burger King across the road
from his new motel. Or taking a shower
with the television on, or looking for something
in the mirror. I judge from the bed
he must have been heavy, or the person before him,
or all the people who have thrown themselves down
here on this bed in this place, night after night.

Through the wall, a man coughs once.
In an hour, he coughs again. Again, once.
Each time it is a flat, hard hack.
From somewhere else, an hour of machinegun fire,
explosions, groans, shrieks.
And somewhere above me, or below,
the low tones under the muffled words,
the hum on which they float,
of two people talking urgently through the night.

The Opossum

DANIEL ELMAN-ROCHE

One morning in Lima, Ohio, I saw an opossum downtown. It was crouched in the recessed front doorway of a sports and novelty store so that the owner could not get in to start his day's business. The owner and his son, a thin, tender boy of about thirteen, stood on the sidewalk and made passers-by step off the curb and walk a few paces in the street. They told each person, "Walk around, please. Wild animal in there."

Instead of walking around, I stopped and investigated. I was on a layover, waiting for the 10:30 Greyhound to leave, and I had a couple of hours to kill.

Sure enough, there where the brick wall and the glass door met sat a wild animal, resembling a large gray rat and looking ready to rear back and slash out with long, sharp claws if anyone dared approach. It couldn't back up because it was in a corner, and it was too scared to come forward and make its escape on the three feet of sidewalk the store owner afforded it.

I'd never seen a live opossum before—only dead ones on the sides of country roads. And I had learned that those piles of grizzled fur were opossums only because someone remarked as we drove by, "Look at that dead opossum."

The store owner, a pallid, rather doughy man, had already called the Humane Society when I arrived. They'd send somebody out as soon as they could, they'd told him. We talked, our eyes on the opossum, about how someone had to take this thing back to the woods, about how if we just scooted it out it would probably get stuck in someone else's doorway. "It could have rabies, for all we know," the store owner said. Once he moved to get a closer look, but the opossum bared its teeth and hissed at him as at a villain in a movie.

Many people passed while we were there. To each, one of us would say, "Walk around, please. There's a wild animal here." Most of them, on their way to work, didn't seem to realize what we were saying. Some of them kept walking in straight lines close to the wall, gazing blankly when they heard us, as if they thought we were distributing religious tracts. Others jumped toward the street when they finally followed our pointed fingers and saw the opossum.

The store owner became disgusted with the people who wouldn't listen. "I should let them get bit," he started saying.

Occasionally middle-aged men stopped and stood with us for a minute and commented on the animal. "Musta come in through the sewer," they often said. "Ugly little devil, though."

I imagined they were right about the sewer. The opossum could have used that as a highway into and around town to do his nightly scavenging. And as a shelter to retire to at daylight. But this time he must have mistakenly scavenged right into the morning rush hour.

The store owner kept looking at his watch. He and the opossum were holding each other up, keeping each other from their duties. "I could go in the back door," the owner said. "But I've got to open this one for the customers." He pulled his sleeve up again and took another look at the time. "I'm already twenty minutes late," he continued with a resignation that also said he didn't know what could be done about it just yet. Finally, he flagged down a police car. The officer pulled over, hung his elbow out the window, and listened to the owner.

"The Humane Society's supposed to come," the owner said to the officer, "but can you do anything?"

The officer looked at the opossum and then back at the owner, who didn't try to hide his concern for the animal. "I can call the Humane Society again," the officer said. "It's their territory."

I wondered why this opossum wasn't "playing 'possum." I thought opossums were supposed to collapse when frightened so their enemies think they're dead and pass them up. This opossum was lying still, but it didn't look dead. It looked frozen by its exposure to danger, its eyes veiled, not even a twitch in its hairless ears, but it didn't look dead. There was some sort of volatility. I didn't know whether a fox would be fooled, but I wasn't.

Thinking that the opossum might be consoled by some food, I pulled from my pocket a bag of raw peanuts I'd been munching during my trip and tossed a few in his direction, but

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he didn't eat them; he didn't even acknowledge them. The first toss was a little short and the opossum didn't reach for it. The second toss bounced off his side and lay in his shadow. The third toss was more accurate; it hit him right in the nose and lay there where all he had to do was stick out his tongue and pull the peanut in. He surely saw it—and smelled it—but must have thought nothing of my attempted kindness and, instead, only of being trapped.

A half hour after I'd arrived, with most people now at work and the streets nearly empty, a tall, large-faced man with slick-looking brown hair and dressed in a tight-fitting green suit and black boots stopped when he saw the animal. He carried a scruffy briefcase and was obviously on his way to work, but he stopped. He showed disgust from the start, for us or the opossum or maybe the predicament itself—I wasn't sure which.

"It's been in there all morning," the store owner explained to the man. "At least since I got here."

"That's just a stupid '*pos*sum," the man said, using the word as if he didn't think much of it. "You think he's gonna hurt you? I'll get him outa there."

We challenged him, "Go ahead," not because we wanted him to, but because he had already started to, boorishly, insolently, without asking. I was hoping he would get bitten.

The opossum hissed and showed its teeth to the man as he approached it, but the man was quick. He put his foot on the opossum's head, jammed his briefcase in between the opossum and its reflection in the glass door, and pushed its body from behind.

"Get outa there," he said.

And the opossum did. It scurried along the wall with its long pointed nose to the cement, its rope of a tail flopping behind it, and got out of the doorway. The man sent it off with a look of loathing and walked the other way.

The store owner and his son and I all looked at each other, our mouths slightly agape. "What do you make of that?" I asked them. We turned to look at the man again, but he had already turned a corner and was gone.

In the other direction the opossum left us, too; it sauntered alone down the street, slowly, not confidently, but as if it had just come out of a movie and was trying to reorient itself to the real world. ☐

Harriet had said she had had a horrible childhood in Bridgeport. Bridgeport, though, was the least of it. The most was that her mother had been manic depressive. There had been years when living was on and off the extreme outer edge of unbearable.

At last, mother died. Her ashes were presented to Harriet, who had to decide whether to keep or dispose of them. She decided to take them to her mother's favorite place in the whole world, the West Haven Mall. So (or so she said) she put them in a paper bag and at the mall, between two benches in the pseudoplaza near the Nut Shoppe, she surreptitiously scattered, or rather dumped them, then walked off.

Now, she says, she could kick herself for having turned around for one last sentimental look at her mother's ashes, only to see some guy with a broom sweeping them away.

M. KASPER

J.P. WHITE

THE BLACK CAT OF HILLTOP PROVENCE

The coiffed poodles promenade past the boules courts
and later dine with their owners on bouillabaisse,
but the black cat of hilltop Provence
runs outside the radius of the dog's leash,
widening the sweep of its arc through lavender and mimosa,
up through the barbary fig and flowering agave,
out across the Roman viaduct to the medieval ramparts
where the air clears of traffic exhaust
and the olive and pomegranate seed make provision enough.

Thrown out of eternity
like a cinder spit from a volcano, the black cat of hilltop Provence
travels from cemetery to chateau
without ever leaving the red-tiled roofs angled into haze.
Sparks fly from its tongue, rough as quartz,
weathered memories curl asleep in its paws,
stories, knotted in its fur, tell of the great Germanic invasions,
the Moslem pirates, the sly cowled mercenaries
in love with the dry sex of history, the incendiary bomb.

Little sister to the panther,
brother to the stumbling defrocked priest,
there is no rendezvous with the morning's anonymous children
and the night's replenishing darkness it cannot keep.
Luck only will let you glimpse into its catholic eyes,
little Mediterraneans, drawing you into rooms of haloed martyrs,
swelling out, silver-gray to cobalt,
infinitely attentive or lazy or milky
with too much seeing from such tremulous heights.

If you find it on a perch, black as onyx baking in the sun,
ask it any question born of this enemy earth.
Ask the black cat of hilltop Provence
how to leap over giant earthenware jars, ochre-colored walls,
ask it how many vaults and arches you must pass through
before you reach the old nail-studded doors of the shepherd's church.
Ask the black cat of hilltop Provence
where to find the baby jesus cradled against
the applied, calculated might of the vanquished desert zealots.

Go ahead, ask it what you will,
for nothing escapes the gaze of the black cat of hilltop Provence,
not the least of all grapes nestled in a bunch,
not the plump French women kneeling in sand and rubbing
their legs and breasts with perfumes and oil.
From where the black cat of hilltop Provence
sits on top of the sun, there is a place by the bluest of seas
for the nakedness of man and woman, the spilled religious blood,
the primordial smile holding ceremony while the icy pandemonium plays on.

Mixed Bags

THOMAS J. REMINGTON

1. *Robots, Androids, and Mechanical Oddities: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick*, ed. Patricia Warrick and Martin H. Greenberg.
2. *Benchmarks: Galaxy Bookshelf by Algis Budrys.*
3. *Shadows of the Magic Lamp: Fantasy and Science Fiction in Film*, ed. George Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin.
4. *Hard Science Fiction*, ed. George Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin.

Southern Illinois University Press *Alternatives* series

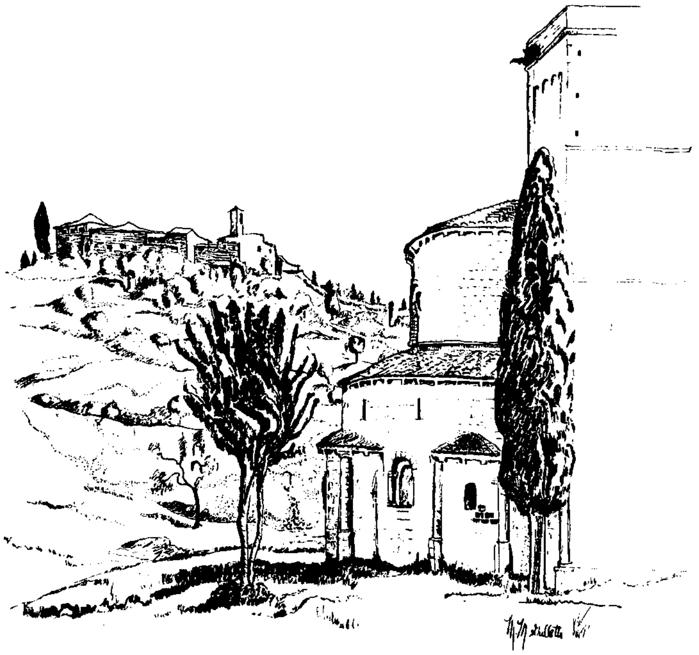
From its inception, the Southern Illinois *Alternatives* series, dealing with the literary value of science fiction, has been a mixed bag; these four most recent publications surely reconfirm the lack of pattern—as well as the series' general unevenness. An easy illustration is *Robots, Androids, and Mechanical Oddities: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick.*

Among the twelve books already published in this series (all of which have been reviewed in this space) are collections of science fiction by Cornell Woolrich, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Clifton and Kris Neville. Each of the four posthumous collections had its peculiar *raison d'être*. Both Woolrich and Doyle were writers whose work outside of SF was so well-known as to completely overshadow their efforts in the speculative field. (It would be a condescension to note the source of Doyle's fame, but Woolrich wrote *Rear Window* and *The Bride Wore Black.*) The other two collections were entirely different. The Clifton anthology gathered most of the short fiction of an important but little-known writer of SF into "the first English language collection of his work." Similarly, the Neville text was a collection of ten of his approximately seventy seldom-seen short stories. Helpfully, both texts included a bibliography of their authors' publications.

The Philip K. Dick collection makes much less sense in this group. Dick was a towering figure of modern SF at the time of his death in 1982, having written an acknowledged classic in *Man in the High Castle* (1962), and a significant number of critically-acclaimed stories and novels, including *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), the work upon which the film "Blade Runner" was based. In short, Dick is well-known as an SF writer; his enormous output of work—like that of many major authors of science fiction—has gone in and out of print with alarming regularity. With one exception, the stories here have seen earlier reprinting—some with monotonous repetition.

So, one wonders, what is this book's particular contribution? Patricia Warrick is a renowned scholar on Dick's work, but little of that scholarship shows through; on the contrary, the chatty repetitions of the introductory materials occasionally suggest a careless jumbling of word-processor files: "He regularly used a postholocaust setting where men struggled to live in a wasteland of ashes" (p. vii); "Typically he creates a postholocaust world of ash and desolation where a few tattered human and mutant life forms struggled to survive" (p. 9). If there is some nicety about the textual authority of this edition of reprinted stories, the editors tell us nothing about it. For scholars, bibliophiles, and libraries, a three volume *Collected Stories* is available from Underwood-Miller (albeit for $80.00), and Doubleday has released a collection, *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*, which includes ten previously uncollected stories.

Surely there can be no sense of *completeness, singularity*, or of *representativeness* here. Dick wrote 115 stories and *many* novels; the fifteen stories included here, the editors tell us, represent "less than half of Dick's stories about robots and androids." Thus, though the anthology focuses on one pattern in Dick's canon, it fails to represent that pattern thoroughly. No bibliography indicates what other Dick stories should be consulted to complete one's knowledge of the pattern.



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The stories are arranged chronologically, presumably to show the development of Dick as a writer—but there is little enough guidance. For example, a comment likely to appear in any knowledgeable sketch of Dick's career is that his enormous productivity includes (and perhaps causes) considerable unevenness in his writing. Brian Aldiss, one of the most respected commentators on the field, compares him with Mary Shelley and C.S. Lewis, but says "his writing is maddeningly inconsistent" (*Billion Year Spree*), while Brian Stableford says he "sometimes seems to lose control of his work," though "when he retains control . . . he is brilliantly inventive and gains access to imaginative realms which no other writer of sf has yet reached" (*The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*).

The introductory materials to *Robots, Androids, and Mechanical Oddities: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick* briefly note the poverty which plagued much of his career, his five marriages, his interest in drugs, a religious experience—and yet never tie any of this information to the texts at hand, which are usually presented with what amounts to little more than "here's another one." Dick and his readers deserve better.

But if the Dick collection seems a step backward from the *Alternatives* series' earlier anthologies of SF stories, *Benchmarks: Galaxy Bookshelf by Algis Budrys* seems a major forward step for the series' gathering of pulp magazine materials. Two earlier *Alternatives* releases were simply republications of individual issues of SF magazines (the July 1939 *Astounding* and the April 1965 *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*); with a feeling of great ennui, I anticipated a natural completion of this exercise in triviality with the publication of some random issue of *Galaxy*, the third of the historical "big three."

Things have turned out considerably better.

"Bookshelf" was the title assigned by *Galaxy* to its section of reviews of the SF field. In 1965, the editor, Frederik Pohl, arranged for Budrys to take over the column. Since then, Budrys has gone on to become perhaps the most respected reviewer of contemporary SF; he left *Galaxy* at the end of 1971, but in the mid-1970s he became (and still continues to be) reviewer-in-residence for *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Benchmarks is a collection of *all* of the book review columns Budrys wrote during his tenure with *Galaxy*. Budrys apparently acts as his own editor, and claims to have done virtually no editing because "I think this should be, as much as possible, a book of record." The book includes an historical narrative by Pohl on Budrys's coming to *Galaxy*, and a brief, informative review of Budrys the reviewer by Catherine McClenahan. But the body of this book is 327 pages of reprints of the actual *Galaxy* columns, eighteen pages of a detailed list of books reviewed and an extremely helpful index.

The book is a major contribution to students of SF. *Galaxy* is long since defunct, and back issues of pulp magazines are hard to come by. Even when they are available, it's a difficult matter to locate specific references to given works in them. *Benchmarks* makes the Budrys reviews available and useful, and they would not otherwise be accessible. In short, *Benchmarks* has all the virtues whose absence I lamented in my comments on the Dick anthology.

If Budrys's reviews of SF are intrinsically less valuable than Dick's stories (and I think Budrys would concede the point), there is a cumulative value to these essays which impresses, and confirms the author's worth as a reviewer. In reviewing Frank Herbert's *Dune* shortly after the book's publication, Budrys notes that "Herbert is that exasperating creature, the writer of great promise. . . . If he thinks—if you think—that the reason *Dune* turns flat and tails off at the end is because even four hundred pages cannot encompass it properly, please consider instead the possibility that 200 pages would have sufficed even for an epic." Shortly after the publication of Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Budrys wrote of that superlative novel: "What this world has to teach its only heterosexual human, galactic ambassador genly Ai, is what it also teaches us. I can't imagine anyone reading it and not learning profoundly from it. Anyone, that is, but the endorsers [one of whom was Frank Herbert] and editors whose other concerns seem not to have allowed sufficient time for either perceptive thought or meaningful utterance."

I quote these two comments not because I agree with them (though I emphatically *do*), but because they exemplify a defensible position on these two major works (the first two novels to collect both the Hugo and the Nebula awards), a position which is familiar wisdom to current scholars in the field—but which position has been won over much time, and supported by the interminable sequels to the Herbert work and the amazing wonders Le Guin has gone on to produce. Budrys's criticism of both books, and his criticism of the field in general, continues to hold validity. His short essays may not show where the totality of SF was in the 1960s—but they show where the *heart* of it was.

Emphatically, I often don't agree with Budrys's sometimes boorish pronouncements (e.g, "A story by J.G. Ballard, as you know, calls for people who don't think"), but I always feel that I know whence he was coming, and that his views—like them or not—are well-defended, coherent, and cogently representative of the best of the field he purported to cover. I'm grateful for this book.

The remaining two texts in this group require more comment . . . or less. Respectively, they represent papers presented at the fourth (*Shadows of the Magic Lamp: Fantasy and Science Fiction in Film*) and the fifth (*Hard Science Fiction*) J. Lloyd Eaton Conferences at the University of California at Riverside and—as such—are collections of work by various hands.

The first of the two is the one I found the more impressive—but I must grant that to a significant extent, my judgment is based on my finding the text the more instructive. I know a good deal about science fiction and though I dote on film—and SF films in particular—I know less of that medium than I do of fiction. This book helped dispel some of my ignorance.

Of the fourteen included essays, half are by people with a commitment to film; they teach courses in it or are professionally involved with it in some way. Invariably, their essays are exciting and informative, and are supplemented by the commentary of Bruce Franklin—who is seldom dull or uninformative about SF . . . or anything else. An occasional focus on the technicalities of film-making served rather to make clear the concerns of that medium than to obscure its significance.

In short, if one is interested in film and in science fiction (and the essays seem to support the contention that it's increasingly difficult to concentrate on one without learning about the other), this text is helpful and informative. I found all of the essays provocative, and would recommend in particular Bruce Kawain's "Children of the Light," which offers a clear and credible distinction between SF and horror films, and then exemplifies the significance of both to modern cinema—ending with an analysis of *Blow Out*, concluding with the observation that the film, "by critiquing its own levels of illusion addresses the reality of horror—because, like all great horror films, its terrible message and unpleasant imagery are meant not to destroy us but to show us something that we need to see," an observation that goes far to explain the current popularity of both genres.

Hard Science Fiction is a different kind of book. The fifth Eaton conference (apparently) gathered together a mixed bag of "hard" SF authors and academic critics of SF to see if there could be any meeting of the minds. The academic critics had the numbers on their side; there are eleven of them represented in the text, versus four SF writers (Gregory Benford, Robert Forward, David Brin, and James Gunn). As an SF writer whose credentials as an academic critic (including the Pilgrim Award—voted by the membership of the Science Fiction Research Association for an outstanding critical career—and a term as president of that organization) are impeccable, Gunn clearly has a mixed affiliation. Benford and Brin are also both academics, teaching university physics courses, and Forward has a Ph.D. in physics and is associated with Hughes Research Laboratories, but all three would probably plead innocent to charges of having practiced criticism.

Perhaps, as one would expect, Gunn's essay seems in some ways the best at treating the two divergent areas represented by the book's authors, concluding that "hard science fiction does not have to mean ignorance of literary values, nor do literary critics have to remain invincibly ignorant of science and its influence on our lives. At its best, hard science fiction brings together the two cultures in a way achieved by no

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I'm a strong believer in Gunn's thesis, and I felt an honest thrill of excitement when *Hard Science Fiction* came into my hands. However, the experiment seems to have worked rather poorly. In one jargon of the times, the play among these people seems parallel rather than interactive. Forward and Brin, as scientist/writers, discuss writing and science; critics talk about the city as psychosexual symbol in SF (Eric Rabkin), or how Thomas Burnet, writing in the Seventeenth Century, peculiarly anticipated some of the methods of modern SF (Paul Alkon); two (Robert Philmus and George R. Guffey) focus on the works of Stanislaus Lem—a writer knowledgeable about science, but hardly a producer of "hard" science fiction. At least two more (David Clayton and Frank McConnell) devote space to a consideration of the bugbear of all SF discussions, "What are we really talking about here?" (What is "hard science fiction"? How did the term develop? Algis Budrys gave the questions the attention they deserve in a response to a blurb put out by Ballantine to tout Larry Niven as a "hard-core science fiction writer": "Inasmuch as Ballantine originally popularized the term 'hard-core pornography,' we don't even have to ask what the term 'hard-core science fiction' may be intended to mean.")

For all my sarcasm, these topics may hold interest, but they really don't contribute to each other with any success. One wishes the scientist/writers might have focused more on their views of literary values (does Forward like—say—*Dr. Faustus* or *Grendel*?) and that the essays of the critics had considered more carefully the significance of "real" science to the literary merit of the kind of science fiction written by Benford, Brin, and/or Forward.

When the two groups do begin to invade alien territory, the score is clearly in favor of the scientist/writers. In his essay, the first in the book, Forward states that his own experience has been that the science in his stories is not simply a framework, or an addendum. His concluding advice to aspiring writers indicates his thesis: "Work out the science carefully, follow its lead, and the science will write the fiction." Forward's comment sounds very much like the literary concept of form determining content, and I found myself wondering if any of the literary types would pick up on it. None of them did so, but, halfway through the book, Benford's essay cites Robert Frost's famous metaphor regarding free verse to note that "much SF is playing tennis with the net down"; he goes on to conclude that "hard SF . . . plays with the net up."

Without any assertion that Benford's comment is unduly profound, I would merely suggest that his analysis goes far toward demonstrating the Gunn thesis regarding hard SF's value. Conversely, when the critics venture into science, they sound (to this critic's ear) weird. For example, Patricia Warrick says casually, in passing, that since the early 20th century, "science has split the hydrogen atom," an assertion that will glaze a physicist's eyes; she refers to Douglas Hofstadter's Pulitzer prize-winning *Gödel, Escher and Bach (sic)* as "a very demanding book," noting that she has "talked to a number of persons who admire it, but to only a few who have finished it"—leaving one to wonder among whom this critic has walked to have learned such powers of condescension.

Hard Science Fiction is an unsatisfactory book, considering what its title promises. But the essays on Lem will illuminate those interested in that major author's work (and Lem is major by *any* criterion—SF or otherwise). The Benford and Gunn essays are downright exciting, and justify the book's promise. What remains will illuminate those who share Gunn's hope that the "two cultures" may find a hard SF meeting place, but the conclusions to be reached seem sadly negative. ☐

Quintessences

M. KASPER

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This is an extremely funny, brilliant book of very short prose.

Some American critics still dismiss very short prose as trivial, but they're wrong. When it's good, when it's not just pretentious poetry with justified right-hand margins, it's quintessential writing, an important modern genre. Nothing's wasted, nothing spun out. It gets somewhere fast, then stops.

Peter Cherches, from New York City, has had his work published in magazines, anthologies, and chapbooks for years; he's one of our top young purveyors of very short prose. *Condensed Book* is his most substantial collection to date.

It has ten sections: two sequences billed as "minimalist novels," a couple of sort-of short stories, one solo sketch, and five batches of linked formal exercises, parodies, and pointed vignettes. The writing is witty and surprising throughout, and full of insights and ingenious angles on romance, family relationships, and social issues. Though a few of the more formal conceits and exercises in style seem a bit tired, all are worth reading.

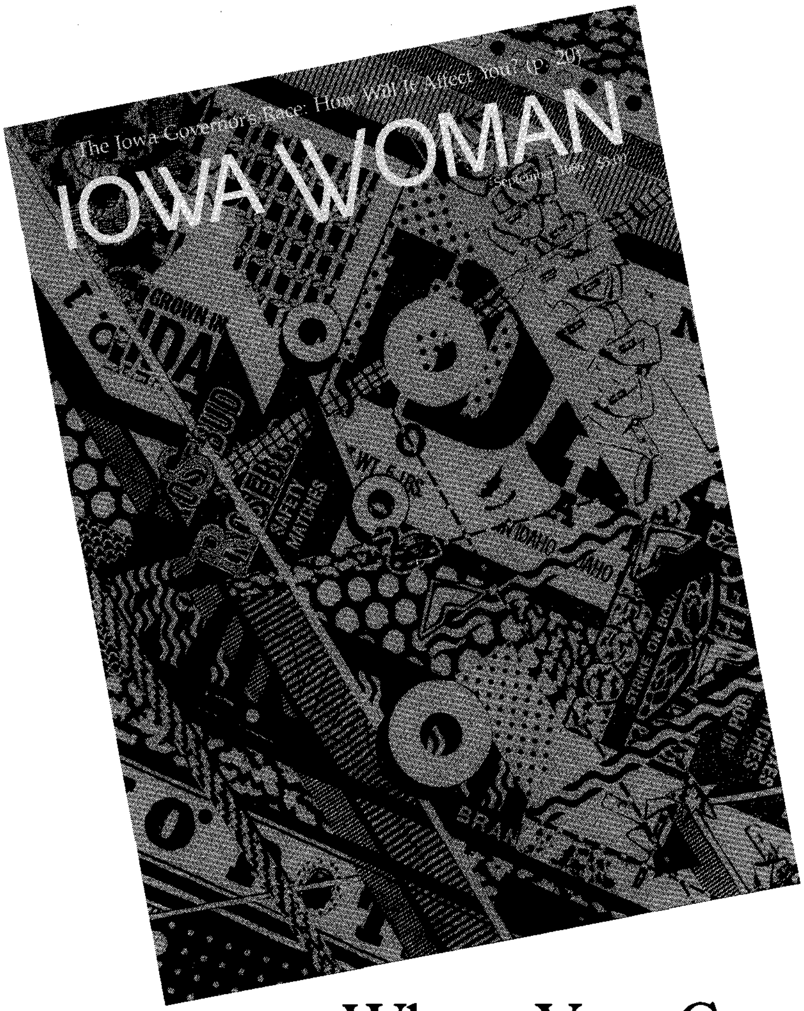
The first piece in the book is perfect Cherches, slapstick but serious:

> Lift your right arm, she said.
> I lifted my right arm.
> Lift your left arm, she said.
> I lifted my left arm. Both of my arms were up.
> Put down your right arm, she said.
> I put it down.
> Put down your left arm, she said.
> I did.
> Lift your right arm, she said.
> I obeyed.
> Put down your right arm.
> I did.
> Lift your left arm.
> I lifted it.
> Put down your left arm.
> I did.
> Silence, I stood there, both arms down, waiting for her next command. After a while I got impatient and said, what next.
> Now it's your turn to give the orders, she said.
> All right, I said, Tell me to lift my right arm.

Another effective piece, on-target and up-to-date, is from 'American Tales,' a group of nine anecdotes:

> Dave has been laid off. He was working for a company that manufactured oomph. The oomph industry is in decline, and as a result many oomph-workers are being laid off. What will Dave do? He is forty years old and never learned how to do anything but make oomph.
>
> Why can't they put the oomph back in America? Dave wonders.

Condensed Book has lots of literary oomph. What's more, it's remarkably accessible. Everybody can get it. And should. ☐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